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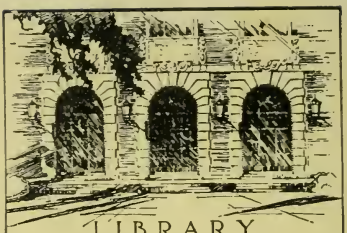

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MARIA,

A DOMESTIC TALE.

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION
TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF SAXE-COBURG.

By CATHERINE ST. GEORGE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
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1817.

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DEDICATION

TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE

OF SAXE-COBURG.

Madam,

An explanation appears to be necessary for my presumption, in offering to the eye of Royalty, so plain, unvarnished a story, as the following "Domestic Tale."

Permit me, Madam, candidly to acknowledge that I penned the present production under a cloud of adversity, with the hope

of contributing thereby towards the support of a numerous family; and I chose for my subject the memoirs of a person with whom I had been well acquainted, from a persuasion that her conduct, under various trials, would prove that a strict adherence to religious principles has always, sooner or later, its due influence upon the human heart.

After repeated disappointments in my endeavours to dispose of the work, I was convinced that without patronage I should never attain my object. At this period I was in London. The domestic virtues of the Princess of Saxe-Coburg were the general theme; and it occurred to me that She, whose high rank made her the most conspicuous of her sex, yet whose rectitude of conduct led her to shun the voice of

adulation, and with her exalted consort to practise in retirement all the social virtues, was of all persons the most likely to assist the friendless! The energy of a parent urged me to make the trial;— the beneficence of Your Royal Highness induced you, Madam, to grant me your gracious protection.

I shall always consider that day as the most gratifying of my life, when Your Royal Highness taught me, that a favour may be rendered valuable beyond calculation by the manner in which it is conferred.

That Your Royal Highness may for a long series of years be the object of love and respect to your own and to surrounding nations; and that with your exalted consort Your Royal Highness may continue

a bright example of conjugal felicity, and enjoy the blessing of health, and every other temporal happiness, shall be the constant prayer of,

Madam,

Your Royal Highness's

Most gratefully devoted

and obedient humble servant,

CATHERINE ST. GEORGE.

Douglas, Isle of Man,
June 4, 1817.

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MARIA.

LETTER I.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER.

DEAR MADAM,

London, Sloane Street, July.

WHEN I had the honour of calling yesterday to take my leave, you kindly bade me write at every town where I could conveniently stop. You see how agreeable was your command, by my eagerness to fulfil it even before I leave London. To-morrow morning, at half after six, I am to mount the stage-coach to go in quest of a future home; and I am now seated to inform you in what part of the world I purpose seeking one. It was my intention yesterday to have acquainted you, dearest madam, with the

whole arrangement; but when in your presence I felt it impossible, from an idea that my plan would not meet your approbation; and a favourite scheme being once determined upon, it is natural to avoid arguments against it. I have on a former occasion acted contrary to your advice, and repented of so doing —how then could I tell you I was about looking for a house in the Isle of Man? a place the very name of which carries a stigma with it; and which stigma I am told it is in the contemplation of the Manks legislature to remove*. You must recollect our old schoolmate Mrs. B——; she is there, and I am sure from no other cause than that of poverty. She writes me word that several other families are there also on the same

* When this work was begun, the change was only spoken of; it has since been effected. The natives of the island, disgusted with the immorality of those persons whose thoughtless and dishonest conduct had drawn upon them the indignation of their countrymen, resolved no longer to live under the disgrace such characters entailed upon them, and obtained a removal of the evil about the end of the year 1814.

account; and that a small house may be had in the country exceedingly cheap—that provisions are plentiful—and the face of the island romantic and healthful.

We now partly know the extent of our loss by the late unexpected failure, as we are to receive only a dividend of six shillings and sixpence in the pound: had the firm continued good four months longer, our money would have been secured in the funds; —but it has been our misfortune to suffer, and it is no alleviation of our misery to know that many suffer with us.

Our future prospect, then, is at best two hundred pounds per annum:—and where in England can we live respectably upon that? Small fortunes are oppressed by taxes which affect the necessaries of life as well as the luxuries: where the latter only are taxed, people tax themselves. But it is to no use that the discontented find fault with the decrees of the legislature, which, no doubt, acts for the best; yet, self-interest will ob-

ject to that which militates against itself.—However, to return to the subject of my letter: Mrs. B——, to whom I had communicated our misfortune, invited *me*, or rather both of us, to Douglas: but the dear children cannot be left; and Mr. Fisher thought, as my spirits are naturally good, that I was the most fit person for the journey, which I dare say may occasion me to be absent at least three weeks, as I intend stopping a day or two on the road to try my influence with Lady B——. You know her riches, and her power; I used to think myself a favourite. Could I obtain from her the loan of one hundred pounds to settle our family on the other side of the water, it would make me quite happy; and, by allowing me a little time, I should be able to repay it. I mean to educate my girls myself; and perhaps we may find out a means to increase our little store. Be that as it may, I had rather eat dry bread among strangers, than expose my scanty income

to the animadversions of my old neighbourhood: and I believe Mr. Fisher, in this respect, thinks as I do.

So well, dear madam, do I know your benevolent heart, that I scarcely need request that you will honour my children by occasionally calling upon them during my absence, which, I promise you, shall not be one day longer than is necessary. Poor Ann will remain with the family till my return—then I shall be obliged to part with the faithful creature;—that will be a trial! but it is one of the many I must submit to.

Adieu, dearest madam! Weigh in the scale of friendship the advantages of my present plan: do not imagine it the offspring of caprice—I am convinced of its utility; and trust, as my friend, you will think the same.

With ardent wishes for your safety till my return, I remain, dear madam, your much attached and obliged friend and servant,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER II.

FROM THE SAME TO THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER.

As I told you, dear madam, I left Sloane-street yesterday morning, and took my place no further than to this town, wishing much to stop a day or two for the opportunity of seeing Lady B——. When I quitted my house, it was with a sorrowful heart and a light pocket. Your god-daughter Frances, as eldest, claimed the privilege of attending me to Charing-cross; Ann accompanied us, to carry my small portmanteau and work-bag, containing such necessaries as I might have occasion for upon the road; these formed the whole of my luggage. On arriving at the Golden Cross I was glad to find the horses ready to start; and entered the office to pay for an outside place: for, as we had only seven guineas in the house, I thought I could not do less than leave two; not doubting but I should

meet with assistance from my friend. Two well-dressed and genteel-looking men, who were in the office waiting for the same coach, observed, "Though the morning was fine, I should find it very unpleasant on the outside, since the day was likely to prove showery." I replied that "I had an umbrella;" and finding my eyes fill with tears at what I deemed a degradation, I kissed my dear Frances, recommending her father and family to her care; for though so young, she is remarkably thoughtful: and requesting Ann's best attentions to all, I began the task of mounting; which, to me, was most distressing, and I performed it so awkwardly as showed I had not been used to the exercise. The driver placed his great-coat so as to make me a comfortable seat beside him, and told me "not to be fearful, for I was as safe there as I could possibly be in my own house." Then stamping with his feet against the footboard, the horses acknowledged the signal by instant obedience: and I opened my umbrella,

which I held low over my head to conceal my countenance. The coachman, supposing I held it in my hand not to lose it, took it with the best intention from me, and placed it behind his back. Thus deprived of my shade I took out my pocket-handkerchief, and, as well as I could, hid part of my face.

On reaching St. Alban's, I found the coach would stop twenty minutes. At first I declined getting down, from a dread of the ceremony of re-mounting; but finding myself the only person sitting on the top, I ventured to descend, and followed the others into the house. Here I was again at a loss, thinking as an outside passenger I ought to go into the kitchen; but on peeping into it I perceived such a motley group that I preferred walking in the passage, till one of the gentlemen I had seen in the coach-office passed by and inquired "whether I would take breakfast?" I said, "A cup of tea would be very comfortable:" upon which he showed me into the parlour, where the other

passengers were sitting—his companion, and an elegant-looking young lady, attended by a female, I supposed her servant from the distance at which she sat. A chair was presented me, which I thankfully accepted; and drawing it near to the table, the lady pushed hers rather back, saying, "I do not remember seeing you, madam, in the coach; I suppose we are to take you in here?" "No, madam," I replied, "I came from London; but I sat on the outside." "O then," says she, "do you breakfast with us?" "If you have no objection," I replied. Upon which the elder of the two gentlemen remarked, that "it was as fashionable for ladies to go on the out as in the inside of a coach: and with respect to choice of society," continued he, "manners constitute the only general criterion of distinction, when further knowledge is impracticable." The lady said she "had not meant to draw any comparison." We then proceeded very amicably to our breakfast: but before I had finished my second cup, two shillings and threepence were de-

manded of each; and I regretted having allowed myself this indulgence, resolving to spare it the next day, by putting some biscuits in my pocket, and making a dinner suffice. I was the first to quit the parlour, hoping by this means to get up unperceived: but the two gentlemen followed, saying "it was their intention to ride outside, and I was welcome to the place of one of them;" which civility I cheerfully accepted. The young lady and her servant had seated themselves. After informing them of the reason of my coming inside I remained silent, though not idle; as I was engaged in trying to delineate in my mind's eye the features of the face now opposite to me. Never had I before seen a countenance so truly prepossessing! it indicated, as my little stock of knowledge informed me, a liberal mind, a good heart, and a benevolent disposition. With these qualities, I was rather puzzled at the manner in which she had first addressed me. "There is something," I mentally exclaimed, "so peculiarly soft and gentle in her look, I could

not have supposed her capable of a harsh expression." And I was endeavouring to excuse her manner to myself, when she interrupted my meditation by commencing the following dialogue.

"I hope, madam, I did not offend you this morning; for indeed I had no intention to do so."

"Your politeness now, madam, convinces me you had not."

"No, really," continued the young lady; "this is the first time that I have entered a public coach, and I had formed a notion that only poor people went on the outside, who could not afford to pay the inside fare."

"And, my dear young lady, give me leave to ask, Are you ignorant that many worthy, well-informed, and well-educated persons are reduced to poverty through unforeseen, and, often, unmerited misfortunes?"

"I have seen but little of the world," replied the lady; "and living in luxury has, I fear, made me thoughtless of others."

"Believe me sincere when I express my earnest wish that you may ever enjoy your present happy lot."

A deep sigh from the stranger told me she was not happy; and seeing my tears flow—for I could not restrain them—she drew from her work-bag an elegant purse; and taking from it ten guineas, presented them to me with the most gracious benevolent countenance, saying, "If this trifle can make your journey more comfortable, do me the favour to accept it: I shall not miss it."

"Madam," I answered, "I honour the principle which urges your kind offer, and I will accept it, if you will favour me with your address: for though at this moment I am almost in want, I hope a time will come when I may have it in my power to repay this unexpected generosity.—Do you reside in London?"

"I have a house there; and a beautiful cottage within half a mile of this spot, and to which I am now going—Jane," said the

lady, " you may get out and walk; ask the driver to set you down."

Jane applied to him: he answered her in the affirmative: and the man having opened her the door, she was soon in the road. I embraced the moment of the servant's absence to say, " My home is in London; I live in Sloane-street."

" The very one in which I live!" replied the stranger: " but I dare not disclose my name, lest I should lose your esteem;—and there is something in your countenance," continued she, " which makes me wish that *you*, of all women, should think well of me."

" Be assured, young lady, I cannot think otherwise than well of one by nature so humane! I shall recollect your features with love and gratitude: and if, from any cause unknown to me, you do not wish that I should know you further, pray let me have some direction by which I may return this money, or at least express my thanks should I not be able to repay the obligation."

The stranger again opened her work-bag; and taking her handkerchief out applied it to conceal her face, whilst she said, "I am the friend of the young Earl of U—: I have lived with him nearly three years, and during that period have enjoyed every comfort that an *unacknowledged wife* could experience.—You will despise me now; but let my youth, when I quitted school to attach myself to the Earl, plead for me!—To speak truly of my situation, it is such as makes me appear what I am not."

"Every thing in my mind pleads for you," I replied; "above all, the goodness of your heart; the susceptibility of which perhaps induced you to this step. I was well acquainted, in the early part of my life, with the earl's late father. But, my dear young lady, how happened it, that one so accomplished as you seem to be, and I must suppose of respectable connexions, has fallen into this error?—So interested do I feel for you, that I shall be unhappy till I hear you are in possession of the

world's esteem—I am sure your mind is virtuous."

"You only do me justice in supposing that," replied the stranger. "I would give the whole I am worth I had never seen Lord U—; yet when I do see him, I love him so entirely, all but himself is forgotten! —But give me your direction—I greatly want a friend to advise me; if you permit me, I will write to you. This is my cottage; I will get out here, because, to speak sincerely, I wish to surprise my Lord: he has sent his chariot regularly for me every Friday evening till last night—it did not come, and I resolved not to wait longer, but investigate the cause. He cannot, I think, be unfaithful!—should that indeed prove the case, I will instantly quit him for ever! —then indeed I shall need a friend!"

I had only time to write my address in Sloane-street, and to express a wish she would fly thither should she want a home. On reflecting how weak is resolution when combated with passion; above all, with

inclination; I have little hope of again beholding the lovely girl. The only part I learnt of her name was from her pocket-handkerchief, which I observed was marked MARIA.

Nothing more happened worth relating:—the gentlemen continued on the outside till evening; then came in, and requested me to remain, which I did; and, while they slept, amused myself with thinking of my fair companion, and of the arguments I should use in our correspondence to draw her soul to virtue. I thought with pleasure of the words *unacknowledged wife*, and appearing *what* she was not. I wished to think Maria really a wife; but the knowledge that the Earl had married Lady Sarah forbade my entertaining that hope. About five this afternoon we arrived in the inn-yard: it is now eleven; and as I mean to rise early, I will wish you, dearest madam, and all your inmates a tranquil night.

Yours truly and respectfully,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER III.

FROM THE SAME (IN CONTINUATION.)

THIS morning, as I purposed, I got up early; and after well brushing my habit, and praying more fervently than usual, I commenced my walk, having first ordered something to be got ready by four, saying "I should breakfast with a friend in the neighbourhood." It was a beautiful morning; and when I left the town I stepped to a cottage which stood near the road, by way of passing the time, that I might not present myself at the hall till a seasonable hour. The good woman had not long risen; she was the widow of a labourer, and four half-starved-looking children were playing about the door, whilst the eldest, a boy, was blowing the fire to hasten the boiling of the kettle.—"Good woman," said I, "will this road to the right take me to Lord B——'s?"

"Yes, my lady," she replied; "but it's four good miles—sure you don't mean to walk so far?"

"I intend it," said I; "I have set out thus early on purpose to be there for breakfast."

"Well-a-day!" replied the woman; "you had better rest here awhile; Mrs. Lewis the housekeeper does not breakfast till nine, and to be sure my Lord and my Lady must be long after her. We shall know when it's eight—for Tom, the stable-boy, rides by every morning at eight, for the letters and hot rolls. I'll set a chair for you, my Lady, near the door." And she wiped one, which I instantly accepted: and Martha (for that I found to be her name) continued her preparations. She put in her morsel of tea, and spread her bread and butter; which done, "If it would not be too bold," said the good-hearted creature, "I would ask your Ladyship to taste a bit; for though the bread's brown, it's very sweet: when my

poor Richard was alive we had whiter; but it has pleased God to take him from me, and I must be content with this."

I felt very glad to partake of her bread and butter; but really I could not manage her tea—there was no milk in it, and it would have been a sin to have robbed the sugar-cup, which contained very little "Your bread is indeed very sweet and good," I observed; "but would it not be cheaper, and much more substantial food, for you to make milk-porridge?"

"O madam! nobody takes any thing but tea!"

"It is true that tea is become very general, even among the poor: I have often wondered it should. Now, in your family for example—I dare say, twopennyworth of milk and one of oatmeal, with a little water, well boiled, would breakfast you all: your bread would be saved, and every one would feel better satisfied."

Martha acknowledged "it might be so," but did not promise to try the experiment.

We continued talking till Tom had passed on his return. I then arose from my seat, and giving sixpence, wished Martha her health and a good morning. At the moment I was putting my hand into my pocket I saw a smile on the countenance of my hostess, which certainly did not increase at receiving only sixpence: I fancy she thought it a very trivial offer from a visitant to the Hall. I felt ashamed myself, but knew I ought not to add more; recollecting that, "in some, 'tis charity to give; in others, merit to forbear."

I proceeded along the road till I reached the plantation: there I was enchanted with the various notes of the feathered choir; my soul felt in unison; every thing wore the appearance of pleasure: the whole face of nature seemed to smile, and say, "God created all things to be happy."—I loitered along, forgetting awhile the object of my errand, for all within breathed joy. When I entered the park, the grand and massy pile appeared through an avenue of stately oaks.

Its magnificence inspired me with a degree of reverence for its owners, and I began to consider the contents of a letter I had then in my pocket, and which I meant to send by a servant to apprize Lady B—— of my visit, as also to acquaint her ladyship with my request, which was—to crave the loan of a sum of money to enable me to settle my family: it also informed her ladyship, that whatever she could conveniently spare should be thankfully returned in the course of twelve months. All at once I was astonished to find myself within only a quarter of a mile of the mansion;—hope and fear alternately possessed my mind. I slackened my pace, to give leisure for consideration: —I almost resolved to turn back: still I went forward: but suddenly a thought more perplexing than all the rest occurred—to which door should I go? To knock at the grand entrance seemed improper, since I could not call myself Lady B——'s visitor; for it was possible her ladyship would be denied when she knew my errand:—to the

kitchen door I could not go, on my own account; neither ought I, from respect to Lady B——, whose associate I had once been:—so I determined to walk along the back part of the house. Here I could only perceive one large door; a beggar was standing at it. Not to appear in his company, I passed him, and proceeded through a long passage which brought me into a hall in which were many doors. With a trembling hand I tapped at one: it was opened by the man-cook. "Pray is the housekeeper within?" I asked. To which he answered, "She is in her own room."

"Will you do me the favour to show me which it is?" He did: and I found myself standing before a fat good-humoured-looking woman, to whom I thus addressed myself:

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, for troubling you; but here is a letter I much wish should be given to Lady B——. Would you do me the favour to send it to her ladyship?"

Mrs. Lewis offered me a chair; then rang

the bell, saying to the person who answered it "Ask Mr. Steel to come here a moment. It is my Lady's footman," said Mrs. Lewis, "and he will take up the letter." As she spoke he entered. "Pray, Mr. Steel, be so good as take up this letter to my Lady: this stranger has walked from S. this morning, and seems desirous of seeing her." The footman went out for a moment, then returned with a small salver, on which I placed my letter, saying, "Be so good as present my respects to your Lady, and if convenient, I should be happy to see her ladyship a few minutes." He bowed, asking, "What name shall I tell my Lady?"

"The letter will inform Lady B—— who I am," I replied; and my heart palpitated, as I felt the worst was over.

Mrs. Lewis began to stir the fire, "hoping I was warm?" "Indeed I am very warm," said I: "the roads are dirty, and it is a long walk from S."

"So it is," replied the housekeeper—then considering a little she looked at me,

saying, "I dare say you are acquainted with my Lady?"

"I have seen her ladyship," said I, "and am very anxious to see her to-day."

"I dare say my Lady is well acquainted with your family?" continued she.

"I am the only one of my family who ever spoke to Lady B——," was my answer. "Oh!" said Mrs. Lewis, with a look that implied "I should like to know who you are."—Could our situations have been exchanged, it is likely I might have been equally inquisitive. A watch which hung over the chimney piece, told me I had sat there one whole hour. "Surely," thought I, "Lady B—— is counting what money she can spare;" and as often as I heard a footstep I cast my eye towards the door with anxious expectation. Another half-hour had passed when it opened, and Mr. Steel appeared with a note, and "his Lady's compliments, requesting I would take some refreshment." For a few minutes I was too much agitated to speak. The note was not

thick; as I opened it, disappointment chilled my blood; it contained these few words:

"Lady B——'s compliments to Mrs. Fisher, is extremely sorry for her, embarrassments, but it is not convenient to comply with Mrs. Fisher's request."

In vain did I summon all my pride; my feelings were most powerful, and I burst into tears, as Mrs. Lewis opened the door to admit three footmen with trays containing brown and white soups in silver basins and covers; cold meat, jelly, cakes, and a variety of wine. I found it necessary to take something to enable me to quit the house; so fixed on the brown soup, which was strong, and assisted much in banishing the unwelcome tears. Mrs. Lewis perceived my distress, and recommended a glass of madeira, which I took. When I drank her health, I expressed myself sorry for the trouble I had occasioned; to which she kindly replied, "she wished her Lady had seen me; for then," she added, "I am sure you would have been relieved."

This was more than I could bear; and my heart swelling with pride, I began to assure Mrs. Lewis, "I did not come to beg;"—that, "though I was in trouble at the present moment, my family was highly respectable."

The good woman seemed hurt she had given me pain, and said every thing she could to convince me she had not meant it. I arose to depart, and Mrs. Lewis kindly accompanied me a good distance; when she wished me a pleasant walk back. I told her I should ever remember her civility, and we parted.

As soon as I had lost sight of the housekeeper, I seated myself under one of the spreading oaks, and relieved my oppressed feelings with a hearty fit of crying. I could still see the stately mansion: here I reperused the letter, then exclaimed "O! lady B——! could you and I exchange situations, how differently should I have acted! at least so I think at present;—but, liberality of sentiment and the power to be gene-

rous rarely unite in one breast. Strange are the decrees of Providence! which opens the hearts of the poor, and closes those of the rich."

"Well," thought I, "I will hasten to the inn, take a place on the outside of tomorrow's coach, and proceed as quickly as possible; since now I must depend on the success of my own exertions." Then rising I pursued my walk; but could not leave off thinking, till finding I was near the town, I once more sat down on the road-side to rally my spirits, and to bathe my eyes from a little brook to take off their redness. The endeavour to exertion generally produces the effect: I arose from my turf seat tolerably resigned; I considered that my former acquaintance with Lady B—— was merely the having been her school-mate, *that* only for a short time, and that I had no right to have built expectation on so slight a circumstance. In this manner I reasoned with myself till I reached the inn; when my hostess informed me she had retarded

my dinner till five, when she had given me up, supposing that I had dined with my friend. I told her she thought rightly; and said I wished to go next day to Chester. She said a coach would set out for Chester at eight in the morning; that it was only the distance of forty-one miles, and that I should be early enough to cross the water to Liverpool the same night, provided I wished it. Glad of this intelligence, I took an outside place; saying, I preferred the outside in summer: for I had observed, in all stations of life, that to be treated with attention one must not acknowledge the doing any action from poverty, though it really be the cause. After taking a walk through the town, which is small (though a great thoroughfare, and well accommodated with inns), I took a slice of cold meat, and retired to bed; ejaculated a prayer for the benevolent Maria, and slept soundly till called by a servant at seven o'clock; so that I had only time to take a hasty breakfast, and resume my station by the side of the coachman.

No sooner were we out of town than a young gentleman followed, calling "Coachee, stop, coachee." He was a thin genteel-looking person, and his slender figure seemed nearly sinking under the weight of an immensely heavy great-coat. The coachman answered his salutation by drawing in his horses, and giving up the reins; saying, "Your honour had better keep a close eye upon Proxy, or she'll cut some d—d capers."

"Like that, coachee—keep her tight—whip's the word. See, coachee, this a snug coat, made at Howell's—only cost fifteen pounds:" and flourishing the whip, off he set at full speed.—On seeing us about to descend a steep hill, I said "Sir, had not you better let the coachman resume his seat, lest the horses should take fright?" "Never fear the horses—like to see blood—no one fears bang-up Sinclair; I drive this coach six days out of seven."

Contrary to my expectation, we reached the bottom of the hill in safety. Here was a public house, and I was not a little sur-

prised to see the coachman fetch a bottle of brandy from it, and some milk, and mixing a strong potion, he first drank himself, then offered it to the Baronet with the familiarity of an equal; and thus they passed the cup between them, till it was emptied. We had now a hill to ascend; all the inside passengers had got out to walk, and being fearful of an overturn I got down also. In the course of our walk I entered into conversation with the other passengers; one of whom was an honest-looking farmer returning with his rib into Lancashire from a visit they had made to some London relations; the third was a young person, who also was returning into the country. When we had ascended and descended the hill, each person prepared to resume their seat, when the farmer said to me, "In troth, mistress, you would be safer inside than out; and if you'll take my advice come in here with us." "By G—d, madam, and it's my advice too," said the Baronet, "to get a snug birth when you

can—so hop in." Then, turning to the coachman, he said, in a half whisper loud enough for all to hear, "These old women make such a d—d bawling out I hate to be near them." This witticism created a loud laugh, and I very gladly got within the coach. Before we had finished that stage, "Pray, mistress," said the farmer, "did you ever hear of a person living without eating?" "I have been told of one," I replied; "and I have seen several who have visited her, but I never had an opportunity of seeing her myself." "Then, if you please, we will see her today," said the good man; "me and my wife intends going to look at her; they say she lives in the next town we stop at; and the driver told me we should stay there twenty minutes."

It was agreed to go; and the intervening time was spent in debating what ought to be given her. "I thinks, wife," said the farmer, "sixpence for you and me is enough; if it be true as she does not eat, why you know she cannot want much to keep her—

But what does these other ladies think to give?" "I'll give a shilling," said the young lass, for I seed all the sights in London, and somebody always paid a shilling for me." "For my part," said I, "I must be guided by circumstances: it is not in my power to be generous, but I will willingly give my mite, and do as you do."—"That's fair," rejoined the farmer: and we were silent till we entered the town of ——. On inquiring for the poor woman's house, a neighbour stepped forward who offered to show it us. As we walked along, she told us of the manner in which the invalid had lost her appetite; and said she had been three years without swallowing any sustenance; only had her lips wet with a feather which had been dipped in water. Upon our entering the cottage, a young girl, the woman's daughter, showed us up stairs into a chamber where her mother was sitting up in bed reading. On seeing us she laid aside her book: every thing had the appearance of being very neat

and clean; she had on a mob-cap, and her face looked very well, and not thin; but her hands and arms seemed like dried bones covered with skin; her ribs looked transparent, and the lower part of her stomach and back seemed as though by the slightest pressure they might be squeezed together. We had little time for conversing with her: —she looked cheerful; we left our mite, and hastened to the coach, each wondering at this extraordinary circumstance, half-believing, half-doubting, the possibility of what we had seen and heard. Nothing remarkable occurred for the next six miles: but I am sorry to relate a terrible accident that happened during the last mile of that stage. The coach had mounted the hill; and as it was going along the road, where you must recollect the declivity, one of the horses took fright: our random driver was off his guard, and in a moment the horses ran down the declivity. All this happened so suddenly, that we were no sooner aware we were going wrong, than we experienced

a dreadful shock by being thrown against each other at the bottom of the coach, with both the side doors open. We all got out, much bruised, but without any material injury; and immediately our attention rested on the outside passengers. One, a seafaring man, who it seemed had been to see his mother, and was returning to his vessel, it is thought was asleep when the horses went over the fence: however, he was thrown from off the top with great violence, and his head having pitched on a small stake, he was dead when lifted up. A woman also had her arm broken.—The sight of these sufferers made me insensible to my own bruises.—Never, I think, was a more dreadful spectacle. The coachman proposed going forward to procure a chaise. The Baronet was only slightly hurt: I was sorry he came off so easily, as I never before had seen any person act so unfeelingly, as he walked on with the coachman. I had heard him say, "It's cursed lucky the farmer did not break his neck; six fat oxen

would not have pacified dame;—you must talk yonder woman over, coachee; I'll pay the doctor and give her five guineas; with that she'll think herself d—d well off. As for Jack tar, I have saved a bullet the trouble of blowing him up. Here, coachee, take these five guineas to get Jack a box; I'll go ask Tom Careless to read an Amen over the poor devil—that every thing may be done decently, you know."

This conversation passed during the few minutes we were examining the woman's arm. Really my blood chilled at hearing the thoughtless creature. They walked forward, and in the course of three quarters of an hour a chaise came: the poor dead sailor was laid along the bottom of it; and as the farmer's wife expressed great horror at riding with a corpse, I went in with the wounded woman, whose arm I rested and supported as well as I could. She had an old cloth pelisse, which I cut open to the shoulder. This person was a native of Liverpool, and had been at Birmingham to

see her son a tailor, who had married there. She told me she was a widow, had five other children, and got her living by making pigs puddings and dressing cow-heel; and lived in a cellar in Dale-street. I advised her to remain in Chester till she should be well enough to travel; and said that I would call and inform her family of the accident. On getting to Chester, I found I was just in time for a coach then setting out for Liverpool. Being desirous of going forward as soon as possible, I put myself into it, and arrived at Woodside by eight; whence I crossed the water here in twenty minutes. As soon as I landed on the quay, I inquired for an inn: several were recommended in a breath by the by-standers. Not knowing how to choose, I entered the first I passed, which happened to be a very comfortable house in Water-street.—I have had a bason of gruel; but though tired and stiff, I felt I could not compose myself to sleep, so have spent two hours in scribbling to you. I will now try to forget my aching

bones and the dismal scene I have witnessed to-day. I was particularly affected with the fate of the poor sailor, from the idea that it might have been my own lot.

I have been directed to inquire at the Manks packet-house for a vessel to that island, I will ask to-morrow.

Adieu, dearest madam! I envy you the comforts of quietness:—that *envy* is an ugly word, I wrote it most unthinkingly: I only wish to taste the luxury; but could not enjoy one degree of it taken from you. It is my constant prayer that Heaven may increase every blessing to you and yours. I remain most truly your obliged

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER IV.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER.

DEAR MADAM,

Douglas.

I BELIEVE my last letter left me in search of a conveyance to this singular and pretty spot. I was obliged to wait three days in Liverpool for a fair wind; and as I had no home but an inn, it ill suited my pocket. However, I contrived to dine each day for eleven pence. This was the way I managed. As soon as I had breakfasted, I informed my hostess that I should dine abroad; so I worked at my needle till two; then left the inn, and walked till three; when I called at a shop in Castle-street, where I had a plate of cold meat in a retired room, and a bottle of spruce beer, for eleven pence: after that I strolled up to Everton, and by nine returned to my lonely room, where I had a slight supper and retired to bed. At

nine o'clock on the fourth morning I got on board the Duchess, a trading vessel which takes passengers between this and Liverpool: finding myself alone among a number of strangers, I went into bed, where I had only been a very short time when I became exceedingly sick.—The captain was very attentive to us all; his name is Quayle, he is a very respectable man in his situation, and conducted himself with great propriety and gentleness of manner. We made the passage in thirteen hours; and I can assure you that the pier where we landed displayed such a show of fashionable well-dressed people, that really they reminded me of the Park, if we may compare small things with great ones;—whether it was the fineness of the evening, or what was the inducement, I cannot tell; but I assure you the *coup-d'œil* surprised and pleased me. The expense of the passage was ten shillings and sixpence; with one shilling to the cabin-boy, which I am sure he well deserved from me, for services that shall be nameless.—Among

the walkers I met Mrs. B——. She looked rather more surprised than pleased, and I felt mortified at her manner: but seeming to recollect herself she said, "Where is your luggage?" I told her it was in a small compass, being come merely to spend a few days. Then saying her servant should fetch it from the vessel, she hurried me off the pier to her own house. There I was astonished to see very little furniture, and the things rather in confusion; and I was almost startled when, inquiring for Mr. B——, his lady said he was gone to spend a few days in the country. "*A-propos*," said I, "in what part of the island do you think I had better seek a house? You know that is the purport of my journey, and I must be as expeditious as possible."

"Why, to tell you the truth," replied my friend, "I can scarcely advise you to fix yourselves here: we do not intend to remain much longer in the place; the society is disgraceful, with respect to the strangers, and you can have no other; for the Manks

people will not notice you, unless you get into their debt, and then they will arrest you for so small a sum as three shillings*!" —"As to society, my dear Mrs. B——, our circumstances will not allow us to partake of much out of our own family. If Mr. Fisher can occasionally make up a rubber at whist, I do not wish to visit on a larger scale; I shall have enough to do at home." The appearance of a servant with the tray put an end to any further conversation that night. I partook of a fine roasted crab, and some poached eggs; for which many unnecessary apologies were made:—I thought them excellent; and when we had drunk a little warm brandy and water we retired to bed.

The next morning at breakfast it was determined that we should spend that day

* The author has had opportunities, during a long residence in the island, of observing, that these are the ordinary sentiments of dissatisfied people whom extravagance brought to the spot; and who, still indulging their love of dissipation, in place of retrieving their circumstances, draw upon themselves fresh difficulties; and then blame the Manks for putting a stop to their thoughtless career.

in making inquiries among Mrs. B——'s friends. But before we could prepare ourselves to go out, a lady called, who invited Mrs. B—— to spend that evening "to play a rubber, and eat a herring." My friend replied, that I had come to stop only a few days—"That was what induced me to come here so early," said the lady, "that I might be the first to solicit the pleasure of Mrs. Fisher's company." We gladly accepted her invitation, when another lady, the wife of a liquor-merchant, entered the room. As soon as the ceremony of introduction was over, the first visitor mentioned that she expected the pleasure of our company in the evening, and hoped also for that of her and her good gentleman the merchant. To which Mrs. L—— answered, "I will only promise for myself." The first visitor, with a polite vivacity of manner, requested we would be early; and, wishing us all a good morning, said "she she would go in search of recruits."—Scarcely had she got out of hearing than Mrs. L—— exclaimed, "Would

you think that is a bride? married only ten days ago, to a gentleman under seven-and-twenty; and she has eight or nine sweet children; she has five girls at home—poor things! my heart aches for them. I am told the two eldest cried all the day of the marriage."

"Indeed then," said Mrs. B——, "you were misinformed; for Mrs. W——, who was present, assured me, they all spent a very pleasant and cheerful day."

"It was outside show then," said Mrs. L——; "for it is impossible they *could* like it. I do wonder at widows making second marriages!"

"I am cured of wondering," said Mrs. B——, "since I have resided in this island."

"Indeed one sees strange things every day," observed Mrs. L——: "but that wedding was one of the oddest! There is something very singular in their coming here; most people think they lived together before in England, but I always contradict that report."

"I believe you may do so safely," re-

plied my friend; "for though I never saw Mrs. Stewart before I met her here, I am acquainted with those who did; and she was always well spoken of."

"I declare I have outstayed my time," interrupted Mrs. L——, "I have twenty places to call at. I go out so seldom, that I affront half my friends." So saying, she left us, and we commenced our walk. "Now," observed Mrs. B——, "our making inquiries this morning will be useless; for I know that we shall meet all the parties in the evening whose advice I meant to ask; so we will take a walk on our most fashionable promenade."

I was delighted with the view from the pier;—the open sea to a Londoner is a new and pleasing prospect; and the rocks on the coast add much to the majesty of the scene, though I am told they often occasion accidents in stormy weather. To the left is Castle Mona, a handsome building belonging to the Duke of Athol; it lies low, which I think must make it damp; but suppose the site was chosen as best protecting it from the

winds.—To the right is Fort Ann, the property of Mrs. Whaley;—in summer it must be a sweet retreat, but in winter I am told it is much annoyed by the water from the hills above it. Here we spent two hours very pleasantly. The Manks fleet (hundreds of vessels in search of herrings) skirted the horizon; and all together formed one of the busiest scenes I had ever witnessed. I had intended not to close this letter till to-morrow; but finding the mail is to go to-night, I am obliged, *malgré* my wish, to send you this without any satisfactory intelligence respecting the object of my journey. Will you, dear madam, do me the favour to inform Mr. Fisher I will write to him next week? as I find the packet goes only once in eight days: in that time, I dare promise that I shall be able to speak of my return. I have the honour to remain, dear madam, your grateful friend,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER V.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO MR. FISHER.

Douglas.

You know, dear Frederic, you desired me to write when I had any thing to the purpose to speak of; now I think the business I came upon must give me a right to address you; as I have now been here eight days, and have seen the whole of the island. Some things I like much; for example, the air is salubrious; and with regard to heat, it is here much as it is in England: the country is extremely rocky, and therefore romantic;—not indeed in the eyes of those who require wood and water—of the former there is very little; but of the latter, plenty; as besides the sea, the hills abound with springs clear as crystal. But in my mind, the idea which has universally obtained the name of romantic arises most from the varieties of nature. But I will argue this point with Mrs. B——, and speak to

you of the price of necessaries. Butcher's meat and coals are the dearest articles, though nothing equal to what we pay for them in London; the best meat here is bought at from sixpence to eightpence per pound—coals at the present time are twenty-seven shillings the ton; which here weighs twenty-seven hundred weight:—in the winter I believe they are higher. Fish so cheap and plentiful, that the town smells of it. I, who thought I could never be tired of fish, am so already. Wines, spirits, and some groceries, are not much more than half the price we give for them in England: wearing apparel is dear in general. And now, for house-rent;—the one I am sitting in is sufficiently large for our family, and pays forty pounds per annum. The day after my arrival I accompanied Mrs. B—— to take tea at a friend of hers, where we met a pleasant party: the house seemed large, and had a good garden attached, the rent sixty guineas, which surprised me greatly; because from the price

of other things I had not supposed there had been one worth that sum*. I find they are considerably lower in every other town than this, and that in the country a house may be had for a very small rent indeed. However, as I would not wish you to become an exile, if we fix in the island, Douglas must be the spot; it is the London of the place. With respect to society, I find it is difficult to select a few good members of it; the people here form a heterogeneous multitude, among which is a great diversity of talents and characters; they being mostly extravagant dissipated persons, of broken-down fortunes; and several of talents and genius, but of the worst kind; of whom it will be most civil in me to be silent. And I am sorry to say that amongst the horde there are not a few of notorious character, whose first motive in

* A house which at that time let for forty is now let at twenty-five pounds annual rent—this reduction is in consequence of the late Act, and the few strangers now resident in the island.

coming here was to escape the punishment of dishonesty which they had deserved in their own country.

I went one evening with Mrs. B—— to a party: it was a very pleasant one; and I am sure composed of as good people as we meet with elsewhere. The host and hostess, —though ill-assorted in point of age, the gentleman being a good deal the younger, —pleased me much: they were newly married; and when I was told the lady had nine children, I secretly accused her of being a bad mother; but when I beheld the fondness and respect of those children towards her, and saw her engaging and lively manner, I thought her an affectionate parent and an agreeable woman. The merchant and the lady whom I had met in the morning were there:—you would like him much; he is one of *your* sensible men; and on the strength of my lessons from Lavater, I pronounced him a good man. His lady, too, pleased me better; for I found she

spoke more from want of thought than from thinking amiss. Two very gentleman-like old men from Manchester were of the party: I find they are well connected. One swore at the cards, even more than you do, and in your genteel way; but there seemed so much goodness about him, that I longed to know him better. Being a stranger on the look-out, they gave me a deal of information:—they represented the natives as civil when well treated; but that they acted most reservedly and cautiously with strangers, by whom they had often been imposed upon; and that if we take a house, half a year's rent would be required in advance. Their laws, too, were stated to be singular, and much in their own favour. Our host spoke highly in favour of the Manks people; said he had found himself treated with great confidence and civility wherever he had expended any money; and that in his country walks he had often experienced hospitality, and in many instances friendship,

from the inhabitants. An excursion was planned for going round the island, in which I made one. We did not extend our tour as far as the Calf, because my object was to see the towns, of which there are four. Castletown was the first we visited: on the road thither we saw several pleasant and some very good houses;—one in particular upon the right on leaving Douglas, called the Nunnery, belonging to Major Taubman; this was beautified with woody plantations, and had good walled gardens. We passed a pretty small village, Ballasalla, in which were the remains of an abbey that I should have liked to explore; but as no other person expressed a wish to that effect, I suppressed mine. By twelve we reached the town, which looks clean and pretty well built: this is the seat of Government. Mr. Smelt the Lieutenant-governor resides here. The castle seems a fine old building; but I had heard it spoken of in such terms of horror (it being the place where all debtors are confined) that I felt no inclination

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to see the inside of it*. After dinner we proceeded to Peel. Here also is a fine castle, that was battered down in Cromwell's time, of which there are still considerable remains. The streets in Peel are narrow, and the whole town has a dull appearance. But as a proof that local situation is no hindrance to social enjoyment, we spent a most cheerful evening at the house of Mr. W——, a friend of Mr. Stewart, who met us on our return from viewing the ruins, and insisted that we should accompany him home, where Mrs. W—— welcomed me with the cordiality of an old acquaintance. This amiable family kept us with music and conversation till a late hour, and we left them with a full conviction that they would have found means to exercise hospitality in a barren desert, since I had never witnessed such genuine warmth of heart as appeared in Mr. and Mrs. W——. We

* The castle has been greatly beautified, and has undergone many improvements for the convenience and comfort of the debtors.

had well aired beds and comfortable accommodations at Mr. Long's hotel, where we staid the night. The following morning we took a ramble along the shore, which is here diversified with majestic rocks. At a distance of two miles from the town is a spot peculiar for beautiful shells and a variety of curious pebbles;—of the latter some very valuable ones have been found. Upon the whole I quitted Peel with regret, and proceeded to Ramsey, which place we reached for dinner. Here the fields wore a beautiful green, and the country exhibited a more English appearance than I had before seen. The town is small, and fronts a fine open bay. The necessaries of life I found to be more reasonable throughout the northern part of the island than in Douglas; house-rent lower, and the society less numerous and more select;—altogether I was greatly pleased with this part; but still think, should we fix ourselves in this island, Douglas must be the place. We returned to it today, and I have employed myself ever

since in writing; intending to send my letter to Liverpool by a vessel which is to sail with to-night's tide.—This is Wednesday and the mail not yet come in, though it was expected yesterday: the wind is contrary, which I find is often the case; but at this season of the year it is not likely to remain long so; I hope to hear a good account of you when the packet comes. I purpose returning by Whitehaven, that I may give you some particulars of Cumberland, which I am told is also a cheap county. Give my love to the girls, I trust they are all you wish them. Believe me, dear Mr. Fisher, your dutiful and affectionate wife,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER VI.

FROM MR. FISHER TO MRS. FISHER.

London, Sloane Street.

I DESIRE, Maria, that you will return with the packet which takes this letter. I have seen Doctor Ford. He tells me, Douglas ten years ago was such a horrid hole he could not stay longer than one month in it. I suppose it has grown worse, like every other place.—But for your romantic nonsense, the island had been unthought-of by me. I shall feel ashamed that you should even have been there. However, make haste to your family, where you are much wanted.

FREDERIC FISHER.

LETTER VII.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER TO MRS. FISHER.

London, Grosvenor Square.

It is with a strong conviction that my dear Maria is well acquainted I would not utter any thing but what pure friendship dictates, that I presume to reproach her for suffering the goodness of her heart to mislead her head:—no other motive could surely have induced you, my friend, to give an invitation to a person in the unfortunate Maria's situation—in your absence too!—but she is now with me, as I will tell you.

According to your request, and indeed as much to gratify myself, I have been every morning to Sloane-street; and always found the dear girls had purposely hastened to complete their domestic arrangements, that they might give me their company during my stay, which generally lasted two hours:

and really the time passed so pleasantly that I always wished it had been convenient to the young ones that I should have remained longer. Fanny was usually employed in reading the Morning Post to her father: on my entrance, the paper was laid down and the work taken up—they have almost finished the quilt—I had nearly trespassed on their secret unthinkingly—in short, I must only say, you will be surprised at their industry. Above all things, I have been delighted with their attention to Mr. Fisher; —and I am sure you will be equally pleased to hear that his manner to them is less harsh than when you are at home: this is a consideration that I know you will feel grateful for. On Thursday last, during my stay, a knock at the door announced a visitor. We guessed it to be Mrs. Blount, when Ann came up to her master, telling him a young lady had inquired for her mistress; and, upon her saying she was absent, had asked to have the honour of speaking to him. "If she wants me she may come

to me," replied Mr. Fisher. In a few minutes the door opened, and a pretty interesting young person entered. At seeing company, a blush bespread her cheek—we had risen to receive her; Fanny reached a chair, and placing it by her father said, in the most pleasing manner, "This, madam, is my papa." The young lady curtsied her acknowledgement, and Mr. Fisher began the dialogue by saying, "To what cause, madam, am I indebted for this visit?"

"To wretchedness, sir," was the answer. Your good man looked at his visitor with astonishment: she continued, "I find Mrs. Fisher has not informed you, sir, of her kindness to me—she told me, should I meet with any difficulty, to come to her: I am now much distressed, not for money, I have enough of that—but for some retired lodging, where I may remain unknown—can you, sir, recommend me any where for a few days?" "Indeed, madam," replied Mr. Fisher, "I am ignorant what lodgings are proper for young ladies; but I am sure of

this, that London is unfit for you, if you are a stranger." The kind-hearted Emma whispered me, "Pray ask papa to let us make up the blue bed." I hushed Emma to silence; for at the moment it occurred to me, that this lady had been your travelling companion, whom you had mentioned in your letter; and seeing she appeared a good deal flurried, I said to Mr. Fisher, "Sir, my time has fully expired; the chariot has waited these ten minutes; so, if you please, I will request this young lady to take an airing with me;—it will do her spirits good, and I will endeavour to supply Mrs. Fisher's place by giving the best advice in my power." "Thanks, dearest lady, for your kindness," said the stranger; and wishing a good morning to the family in Sloane street we took our leave; not without some speaking looks from Emma, (you must take care of that child, or her susceptibility will injure her frame, and hereafter endanger her conduct! —Pardon me, you are my sister in affection,

and I feel for you as such.) During our short ride, Maria (for she informed me how you had met on your road out of London) displayed a mind ill at ease; but, when she spoke her sentiments, evinced such a noble and really pious disposition, that before I reached my own door I had determined to protect her, and said every thing I thought likely to calm her agitated spirits. "I will give you apartments in my house," said I to her; "but it will be necessary that you should remain retired in them, for your own comfort, and for my peace. I will spend all my leisure hours with you; you shall have books and work. Love is a strong passion; I have felt it, and know it is to be conquered by employment; in time, repentance will again give you a place in society. I will appoint a servant to attend you; all I require of you is, that you will be secret as to your real situation." Her answer struck me as singular:—"Madam," replied the stranger, "I accept your offer with grati-

tude; what grieves me most at the present moment is, that my situation does not permit me to speak *truly* of myself." I assured her I would never trouble her with unnecessary questions.—We had now reached my house; where, after remaining for some time in close conversation in the drawing-room, we separated;—she retired to her apartment; and I, to dress for dinner.—I have confided my visitor to my trusty servant Charlotte; she has been always devoted to me, and, as I have ever found that when there is a mystery to be observed it is best not to hint that there exists a secret, I merely told Charlotte, that I should place under her care a young person whose present stateof health rendered her unable to bear the fatigue of society.

I could see but little of my guest yesterday, being engaged to dine at Chelsea: today I am obliged to write, according to your order of putting my letter into the post-

office on a Saturday. We long for your return, in which, next to your own family, no one will participate more gladly than your sincere friend

FRANCES HUNTER.

I TRUST my readers will not deem the appearance of the author an improper intrusion, and that they will pardon me for relating and explaining such incidents as are necessary to be known, and which the correspondents have not time to relate.

During Mrs. Fisher's visit to the Isle of Man, a party agreed to accompany her in making the tour of the island; but from some inconvenience which they had met with on the road, they merely visited Castletown, and returned to Douglas to set down the ladies who had declined going any further. The party were dining at Mr. Stew-

art's, when Mr. S. proposed (as he then had a gentleman with him on a visit) going to see the Calf. Mr. B—— offered to accompany him; as also Mr. J——, from whose society they expected much additional information, he having lately published an account of the island. The host politely, and with all that good humour which generally attends the first month after marriage, requested the ladies would spend the two days of their absence with Mrs. Stewart; which request was so earnestly seconded by three very amiable daughters of Mrs. S——, who declared "their mamma would otherwise be quite lost," that Mrs. Smith, Mrs. B——, Mrs. Fisher, and Mrs. L—— promised to breakfast the following morning with Mrs. Stewart at seven o'clock, to see the gentlemen off; after which the ladies were to walk to a rock by Fort Ann, there take some refreshment, and return in the cool of the evening. Accordingly the party was punctual at the appointed hour.—It was a delightful morning, the weather promised

every indulgence; and after a hearty breakfast of tea, eggs, and red herrings, the gentlemen mounted their horses, and the ladies commenced their walk. It was nine o'clock when they reached a nook in the rock under Fort Ann—the general exclamation now was, "How shall we amuse ourselves?" Mrs. Stewart's daughters said, "Let us bathe." Mrs. L——, with rather more of sarcasm than good nature, replied, (looking at Mrs. Stewart) "We married ladies may not all be in a bathing situation—as I believe it to be dangerous to many when in the family way." "Well," said Mrs. B——, "I am safe, so I will bathe with the girls." "And those who do not choose that employment," said Mrs. Stewart, "can walk with me on the shore and seek shells; for though I am safe, as Mrs. B—— expresses it, bathing never agreed with me."—Then leaving the bathers to themselves, the rest found an amusement in picking up all they could find that was curious. About eleven, bathers and walkers had returned to the

nook; where they partook of the fare they had brought with them. That over, again the question was argued, "How shall we divert ourselves?" "Suppose," said one, "we each sing a song, or tell a story." "We will," was the general answer; "and I think," added Mrs. L——, "the youngest had better begin; that will be the way to save the best for the last." "Indeed, mamma," observed Emily, "it is hard upon me, for I can tell nothing but what I have read in books."—"And I am sure," replied the mother, "you have read and learned many good things; you know I had not leisure to hear you repeat the account of Louis the Sixteenth, which you promised to get by heart; so let me have it now; and your sisters will assist you when you are tired, or at a loss."—"Well, mamma, I will give it you in the words of the princess who writes the account to the Duc d'Angouleme, since become her husband."

"It was in the seventh month of our

confinement in the Tower that my aunt the Princess Elizabeth received the following note.

Note from an unknown friend to the Princess Elizabeth.

" Prepare the Queen for the trial she must shortly undergo; they are about to take from her her son, for the pupose of educating him according to the present laws: there is nothing to apprehend respecting the child's safety, since he is necessary to the faction. I humbly advise that ye meet the fury of your enemies with no other weapons than those of prudence and fortitude." —— ——

" My aunt burst into tears, whilst perusing this fatal paper; which the Queen perceiving, requested to know the contents. At first my aunt refused—" If it be a decree against me," said my mother, " I am prepared."

' It is not, dear sister.'

' What then is it? perhaps an order for our separation!——'

'No, I and my niece shall remain with you.'

'Good God! then it must be my son whom they dare to ask of me!' And the Queen fell lifeless on the floor.

"With a great deal of difficulty we recovered her to a sense of feeling, and her eyes sought her son.

'Where is my boy?' said the Queen in a voice of agony. 'Have they taken him from these arms? Where is he?'

"The child was asleep in the bed prepared for him in his mother's room. Thither she went, and taking him up pressed him to her heart—saying 'O my son! I am going to part with thee!' Her voice awoke the child; and quickly raising his head, 'No, no, dearest mother! I will never quit thee!' and he reached his arms about her neck. My mother placed him on her knee, and began to kiss him. I threw myself at her feet, and held her hand which I wetted with my tears; while my aunt endeavoured to repress the grief with which

she felt affected.—'What is it they want with my son?' my mother again asked: 'His father left him to my care—Is it not enough that they have deprived him of one parent? Surely they might have allowed us together to have wept his loss! What have they to fear? Their watchful vigilance has rendered escape impossible——Alas! they suspect that I may relate to my son his former splendour, and thus sow in his heart the seed of revenge!—Too well they know this would be useless! No, they seek his death!—they seek mine!'

"My brother alarmed caressed the Queen, whilst my aunt vainly tried to calm her agitated frame. It is only a few whose knowledge of human nature entitles them to describe the feelings of a mother parting from her child! a property, of which no law can deprive her, without a crying injustice; from the noble lion to the timid mouse, each mother clings to her offspring with equal energy—would exhaust her strength in its defence, and rather lose her life than

give up the charge. This is the common instinct of nature; else, what would become of the feeble infant, did it not find support in its mother through the various sufferings of childhood? But think how such a separation may be aggravated by circumstances! Every thing united to render my mother's case most pitiable:—the king, her husband, dead—herself a prisoner—out of the reach of knowing the fate of her son—and certain that, should the monsters who dared to commit the outrage think it favourable to their interest to preserve the boy's life, they would extinguish those honourable principles that were now forming in his innocent heart; by wickedly misrepresenting all her actions, they would obliterate his natural feelings for his mother; for her, who would most willingly have sacrificed her life for the happiness of her child. They would calumniate the sacred name of his father, and preserve his existence only to render him unworthy of his country's love! 'Perhaps they will suffer him to live,' exclaimed

the Queen, ' that he may serve as the shadow of a king, through whom they mean to govern; and, when they shall have assumed to themselves full power, will not hesitate to sacrifice him, as a useless tool to prevent its becoming dangerous. O my son! why did I give thee life to see thee covered with ignominy? or murdered by a fanatic crew? Better had it been that I had stifled thee in my womb! or that I had died before I gave thee birth! Think not I will bear this separation; my life is hateful, and I will resign it——My son, wilt thou remember me?'

"The child answered his mother with fond endearments; and the Queen, exhausted with fatigue and sorrow, sunk into a slumber—the dear boy slept on her bosom——

"My aunt and I passed the night by my mother's bed. Her sleep was disturbed; violent agitations often awoke her; and daylight appeared, without her having had more refreshment than those short intervals

of rest, which wearied nature forced upon her.

"The Queen now ordered me to read to my brother the letter which his father had written for him; impressing upon his mind, that he should notice, and fulfill, every injunction therein contained. She then dressed him herself, as she had been in the habit of doing from the day good Crilba left us; every part of my brother's garments was wet with my mother's tears—while she repeated 'Poor dear! who will next perform this office?—who shall comb thy hair, and form sweet ringlets on thy lovely forehead?' Then cutting off a lock, she inclosed it with one which my father had sent to her only a few hours before he quitted this world of sorrow. 'Who, dearest boy, will render to thee those attentions which are necessary to cleanliness? Some mercenary hands,—cruel ones, perhaps,—who will deem it a trouble! Do thou, my dearest child! soften their hard hearts by thy engaging smile!!—but never, dear boy! commit an

action of which thou mayst be ashamed. Remember that thou must not, to preserve thy life, sacrifice those principles of honour which thou didst receive with thy life's blood!—Think that thy father sees thee! that he beholds thy every action from his seat in heaven! Think, also, thy mother yet lives! and that thou wouldst cause her the most dreadful of all deaths, were she to learn thou hadst disobeyed her!——'

"My brother promised to observe all the Queen had told him. Scarcely was he finished dressing, when the magistrates entered our apartment, and read the order which invested them with authority to take my brother. In what words, my best beloved, shall I describe that trying moment! It brings to my memory that fatal hour when I beheld my mother for the last time myself. She assumed a fortitude surpassing nature's effort, to suppress the agony with which her bosom heaved; and received the delegates of the people with dignity, but without haughtiness. No longer the

the enraged queen, she appeared the tender parent, fearful of irritating those who henceforth were to be the guardians of her treasure. Stifling her sobs, she recommended him to their care in the kindest terms.

"My brother ran into the arms of my aunt, then into mine; my mother took him once more to herself, covered his face with kisses,—and, without waiting a repetition of the order which was to sever the fibres of her heart, placed her son between the magistrates in perfect silence. They walked out, followed by my brother. The queen was seated: she watched with her eyes till he had passed the door the child she was never more to see. Scarcely was that closed, than she fell from her chair, and remained on the floor without the least sign of life."

The next sister now took up the narrative in the following words:—

"The young King, on quitting the protection of his mother, was conveyed into the chamber where his august father had

spent the last of his days. Here he was styled *the whelp of the Temple*, the queen being publicly called *the Austrian wolf*. In this place he was attended by a monster named Simon, formerly a shoemaker; by habit a drunkard, and an abandoned miscreant. One day the prince narrowly escaped the loss of his eye, from a plate thrown at him by this brute, who was waiting on him at table. Simon often beat him unmercifully: once, in an excess of passion, he took up an iron, with which he threatened the prince's destruction. 'Capet,' said this brute another time, 'should these Vendeans obtain thy liberty, what wouldst thou do?' 'I would pardon you,' replied the young king. After a few months Simon was removed from the Temple, and Louis the Seventeenth remained alone, without change of linen or clothes, deprived of every attention necessary at his age: his bed was never made; neither the sheets changed, nor the room swept:—each night and morning, was thrown rather than given

to him some gross kind of food; and, under pretence of assuring themselves of the young prisoner's existence, they called at his door nearly every hour, 'Capet, Capet, art thou there?' The child awoke in agitation, and rising in his bed replied, 'Here I am, what do you want?' 'Go to bed again,' the Cerberi would say.—Such was the unhappy situation of Louis the Seventeenth till the autumn of 1794, when the death of the tyrant Robespierre once more changed the government of France; and the King was committed to the care of M. L'Aurent, and after him of Messieurs Gomin and L'Agnes. But the efforts of these gentlemen were of no avail; the young king's constitution had been undermined by the treatment he had received; he was even too ill to be removed. At this time the humanity of the Senate allowed to Madame Royale the society of Madame de Chaterene. Through the means of this amiable friend the princess obtained an interview with her brother, the day previous to his dissolution.—She

thus describes her visit in a letter to the Duc d'Angouleme :—

" ' Whatever had been my ideas respecting my brother's situation, they fell infinitely short of the miserable state in which I found him. On entering the room, I was informed it was the same which had contained my father. I will not try to express to thee my feelings at finding myself in that chamber! they were painfully acute at the recollection of past events. These gave way to sensations still more dreadful, on approaching the bed where lay my unfortunate brother, without one trace of his former features, except his beautiful eyes, once so like his mother's, and to which a burning fever still gave a gleam of animation. His cheeks were sunk, his lips discoloured; and the frightful leanness of his body gave an idea of bones covered with a hard dry skin; he breathed with difficulty, and the shrieks he occasionally uttered from excess of pain made him a heart-rending object to all who were capable of feeling. What then must it

have been for a sister !—— I threw myself on the bed, and with anguish pressed him in my arms: he seemed alive to the kindness of the act, but ignorant of my person; he moved his dying lips upon my cheek; a few tears were perceivable on his face, whilst he faintly whispered the name of 'Mother.' Whether his bewildered thoughts made him mistake me for her who had given him life, or that he had been in the habit of giving this name to the person who had latterly used every effort to assist him, I do not know.

"'The young king was at this period attended as he would have been in happier times: two able physicians remained constantly in his room, and vainly employed every effort of their skill to restore his exhausted frame, which had been worn down by the cruelties of those appointed by Robespierre to take the charge of him.

"'I remained by my brother's bed during the best part of the night: his beating head rested on my bosom, and from his

attendants I eagerly seized the cup, that I might enjoy the pleasure of allaying his thirst. From the moment I held him he seemed insensible to every thing; not another complaint was heard: but about four in the morning he ceased to swallow—his breast swelled—his eyes became dim—his extremities were chilled with the damp of death—and convulsive movements told the approach of that agony which preceded the awful moment of dissolution. After two more hours of acute suffering, the wheels of the great engine stopped..... and in his tenth year he died of old age! the 8th of June 1795. The young king was buried in the church-yard of St. Marguerite, Faubourg St. Antoine,—attended by a few persons to his grave.' "

The party in the rock discussed the sufferings of Louis the Seventeenth according to their several feelings; each lamenting that one so young should have been doomed to such a miserable life.

Mrs. Smith was reminded it was next

her turn to favour them with something. She replied, " I must try to dissipate the melancholy our last subject has left upon our minds, by a song;" and she began that sweet melody " Hush, every breeze." Her voice is powerful, yet sweet; the scenery around was favourable to harmony, and we were all delighted.

Mrs. B—— sat next; and, declaring she had not any voice to sing, she told her story in the following words:—

" I have just finished reading the history of the duchess of C——, with which you are all doubtless acquainted. I lately met with an instance in London of a similar nature. A gentleman, whom I shall only call by his Christian name, Charles, a partner in a respectable house in London, and who occasionally travels during the summer months, is intimate with Mr. B——, and has been, during the last ten years, in the habit of dining with us whenever business brought him to our little town: he is remarkably pleasant, full of anecdote, and

seems naturally of a cheerful temper. But I have often observed he was subject to frequent absence of mind; and remarked to Mr. B——, 'Though Charles is pleasant, I am sure he is not happy.' 'I am of your opinion,' said Mr. B——, 'and to-day in conversation I happened to say to him, 'I suppose, Charles, you are a married man?' his reply struck me. He answered, 'I once was so happy!' And directly he seemed so lost in thought that I repented having named the subject.'

"In these occasional visits which Charles made us, on going away he would always say to Mr. B——, 'Should you ever come to London, remember you will be expected to dine in Warwick-street;—I don't see formal company, but I have always a hot dish at four.'

"Last year, you know, we were in London; and one morning Mr. B—— told me, that after he had seen a person he was to meet at Drummond's he would take pot-luck in Warwick-street. Now it so fell out,

that, instead of the person meeting him, as he had appointed, at one, he waited at Drummond's till three; and it had struck four when Mr. B—— reached Warwick-street. The door was opened by Charles himself, who for a moment looked grave, so that Mr. B—— thought himself unwelcome, and was about to return, when a smile illumined his friend's countenance, and he drew Mr. B—— into the hall, saying How happy he felt to see him; and took him to the parlour—whispering as he entered it, 'You will excuse all you see there.' Supposing Charles alluded to the badness of his dinner, Mr. B—— was assuring him 'the pleasure of spending an hour in his company was the sole purport of his visit;' when he had entered the room, and found himself struck, nay shocked, with the lean skeleton of a woman sitting at the bottom of the table:—from her extreme leanness her figure seemed uncommonly tall; she wore a black stuff gown, a black cap close to her face; and the death-like whiteness of her skin gave to her the appearance of an inha-

bitant of the other world. Seeing Mr. B——'s attention was riveted on this object, Charles whispered, 'This is an unfortunate maniac; she is perfectly harmless.' Upon which Mr. B—— drew his chair to the table. The lady did not speak; neither did she seem inclined to eat any thing, till, urged by Charles, she swallowed a little of what she had upon her plate. As soon as the cloth was removed, the servant brought a strange-looking cup, into which her master poured one glass of Port wine. The servant presented it to the lady, saying, '*Remember!*' She took it; and Mr. B—— says, as she lifted the beverage to her lips she raised her eyes towards him, with such a look of anguish, accompanied by such a deep and affecting sigh—yet with more the look of resigned affliction than the wildness of insanity—that Mr. B—— felt tempted to address her. But before he could arrange his thoughts she arose, and leaning on the servant's arm went through a door into an adjoining room that seemed totally dark. The door was bolted by the servant on the

inner side, and the lady appeared no more. Immediately after this circumstance Charles reached two tumblers from the sideboard, and filled them with Madeira; as though he needed false spirits to entertain his guest. Mr. B—— has no objection to his glass; and, urged by his friend's example, they finished the fourth bottle. Charles abruptly asked Mr. B—— his opinion of women.—'I judge them by my wife,' was his answer, 'and I love the dear creatures!'

"'I detest them!' rejoined Charles: 'they are false! all false as hell! Once, I thought as you do;—then I did not know them—execrable hypocrites! deceitful syrens!' And his passion rose to such vehemence that Mr. B—— took his hand, saying, 'My dear friend, calm yourself:—perhaps some one unfortunate person has made you mistrust the sex;—come come, discard all dismal thoughts—Suppose we go to the Theatre?' 'Pardon me,' replied Charles; 'you are the only stranger who has dined in this room for the space of four years. I want a friend;

and, if you would not think the worse of me, would confide in you. But, when you know my story, you will say I have been lenient.....That person you saw at my table was once my wife!'

"'Could she then cease to be so?' asked Mr. B——.

"'Yes,' replied Charles; 'the bond is dissolved by the laws of God and man. Listen, while in few words I speak the misery of my fate. The woman you saw is a native of Exeter, and was the only child of a doting father:—from his hand I received her, with these words; 'Charles, I here give you up the darling of my heart; she has been for eighteen years the unceasing object of my care and love!—I have reared her tenderly; —she is pure as innocence;—she loves you; —let no cold neglect chill her affection, but protect and guard her as you value the blessing of Heaven!'—I received the hand thus tendered with thankfulness;—for I loved her! Our first two months passed in comfort: but when the time for making my annual

journey arrived, she fretted at the thought of my absence. Accustomed from childhood to experience her father's exertions to please, she expected attentions incompatible with my business, and to which my education had rendered my heart a stranger:—*she* grew discontented; so did *I*.—Then it was that a viper in the shape of a man, who had been my partner in trade for some years and in whom I had placed the highest confidence, wound himself into her favour; and before I was even suspicious of any misconduct, I was convinced of my wife's guilt and my own disgrace!—for, returning one night unexpectedly to my house, I ascended my chamber; and there witnessed a sight—the recollection of which harrows up my soul!—Fired with the spirit of revenge, I took down my pistols; and loading them, insisted upon instant satisfaction. The wretch took the pistol: We placed ourselves in an attitude to fire.—My antagonist did not raise his arm, but kept his weapon bent towards the floor; whilst the ball of mine

entered his stomach, and in a few minutes after he expired! I surrendered myself to the laws of my country. In a few days my trial came on; when, in consequence of a clear statement of the circumstances, the fact I had committed was justly esteemed manslaughter.—My first action after regaining my liberty was to employ a resurrection-man to procure me the body of him who had been the destroyer of my peace: and of his scull I made the cup you saw, to remind his paramour of her guilt. To punish her, I make a prison of my house; and for the last four years no person has entered this dwelling but myself and the servant. When I wish to see a friend, I appoint a coffee-house for our meeting. Had I known of your being in town, I should have sought your company in the same way: but now that you are acquainted with my sad situation, I shall at all times be happy to see and to receive you.'

"Mr. B—— remarked to his friend, 'that the lady seemed really penitent; and he

thought, after so long a period, her punishment might be somewhat mitigated.'

"'Never!' said Charles; 'the longest life cannot atone for such depraved perfidy: never will I exchange words with her—never shall the light penetrate her chamber! The only lenity my justice will allow me to show her is, the indulgence of taking her meals in this room.'

"Mr. B—— tried all in his power to influence Charles: but finding it only served to irritate an injured and a naturally revengeful disposition, he dropped the subject, and has never since thought it prudent to resume it."

The tale concluded, the ladies began their comments. The three young ones were anxious Charles should receive his wife again: for, though well-informed and secretly condemning guilty actions, they deemed it just that punishment, received with resignation and a thorough compunction of heart, should restore the sufferer to a place in society. The other ladies observed, "that want of

sentiment in Charles had rendered him careless of his wife, and had thus laid her heart open to the attentions of another."

At present I am unacquainted with the secret springs that occasioned this fatal catastrophe: but, as I often visit London, should I be able to collect further particulars, I shall not fail to relate them in the course of my book.

A short time spent in conversation brought it to the hour of returning home. Mrs. Stewart having requested her male visitors to be charitable, they had understood her meaning; for the ladies had only time to adjust themselves, when their friends the two Manchester gentlemen, with two others, joined them. Tea over, they formed two tables at whist, at which they amused themselves till a late hour.

It was ten the next morning when the ladies were seated round Mrs. Stewart's breakfast-table; the weather still fine, they spoke with pleasure of repeating their walk. The hostess informed her daughters, that

as the gentlemen would most likely return that evening to a late dinner, it would be necessary for one of them to remain at home for the purpose of attending the household concerns. No one spoke; but presently the second arose, and whispered something in her mother's ear which brought tears into her eyes. Mrs. Smith observing this, "hoped nothing unpleasant had occurred?" Mrs. Stewart answered the kind inquiry by saying, "It was joy I felt at that moment; though the thing itself be trivial, it proves my daughter capable of self-denial, which I ever regard as a virtue. She desired to remain at home; and as I knew she did so with a view that her sisters should have pleasure, it gave me a sensation of delight which makes me exult as a parent."

The kind-hearted girl assisted the ladies with their hats; and, as she watched their steps, felt herself amply repaid in her own consciousness and the approbation of her parent.

No sooner had the party reached the fa-

voured nook, than they seated themselves upon the stones, and resigned all thought of bathing for the pleasure of hearing a tale; and reminding Mrs. L—— it was her turn, she began excusing herself by saying that, having been brought up in the island she was acquainted with but few subjects, never till lately having mixed much in society. "As to our national stories of ghosts and fairies," said she, "I deem them ridiculous."

"Tell us about the Manks," was the universal request.

"Though I am not yet forty," continued Mrs. L——, I recollect that in my younger days there were not more than four strangers in Douglas. Their gradual increase since that period has occasioned every article of life to be three times the price it formerly was: yet we know their residence amongst us to be productive of numerous and great advantages;—the only reason why we do not enter more generally into their parties is owing to the necessity

we feel to be cautious, in consequence of our having been often and cruelly deceived. I have known several persons who have come here with every appearance of respectability—have taken a house—furnished it—paid for every thing the first half-year—and when by this conduct they had established their credit, they have incurred debts to the amount of many hundred pounds; and then, through some disguise or an assumed name, have procured a passport and quitted the island. Among those we now see on the pier are very few whose principles render them fit for honest society.—The little fellow whose appearance more resembles a monkey than a man does not want good sense, and is of one of the most respectable families in Ireland:—his being married has not prevented his paying his devoirs to a young lady, but I presume he does not mean to carry the joke so far as a second marriage.—That genteel well-looking man is also of a good family in England: he possesses genius, talent, and

taste; yet from an eccentric thoughtlessness of disposition no specific sum can supply his numerous wants.—The little person behind him has been a merchant, and has failed three times: his disposition would disgrace any profession, his honour having been sullied by more mean actions than any person I am acquainted with; and though he now subsists on the income reserved for his wife out of her own property, he has nearly exhausted his frame by habits of debauchery."

"Really," interrupted Mrs. Smith, "this place seems by your account to be worse than Botany-Bay."

"Indeed," replied Mrs. L——, "it is so far worse, that the people who go to Botany-Bay are obliged to employ themselves in some kind of work, whereas those who come here are free from all restraint; and from the frequency of bad example every vice is indulged, I may say encouraged.—But," continued Mrs. L——, "I would by no means have it understood, from

what I have just now said, that the Manks people entertain a decided prejudice against strangers in general,—I merely wish to convince you of the reason of our cautious behaviour towards them. Within my narrow circle of acquaintance, in addition to the present company, I visit five other families whose only motives for fixing themselves here I know to have arisen in the smallness of their incomes, which did not allow them to maintain a respectable appearance in England. The two Manchester gentlemen we meet so often are worthy characters:—they left their own country with credit, and have supported it here to a nicety;—were the generality of strangers like these, our manners would improve with our property."

Mrs. L—— here ceased speaking: and it being now twelve o'clock, the ladies solicited Mrs. Stewart to commence her story. "I know not," says she, "what subject to choose; for, having spent my younger years in a convent, I never knew so much of life

as since I have resided here; and fear my budget contains nothing to amuse."

"Oh, tell us about the convent—we should like to know what kind of people nuns are, from you who have lived with them."

"They are very different from what the generality of books represent them," replied Mrs. Stewart:—"But where shall I begin? Do you wish to know how they pass their time?—It is so filled up by the exercises of devotion, the instruction of youth, and needlework, that very little is spared for recreation, and none for *ennui*."

"Did you ever see a nun take the veil?" asked Mrs. B.

"Several," replied Mrs. Stewart, "in my own convent of Austin nuns at Paris, and in many other houses."

"Pray relate to us the ceremony," the ladies requested.

"Most willingly," replied Mrs. Stewart.—"You must know that every female is al-

lowed one year and one day for her noviciate. Prior to that a ceremony is performed in the presence only of the community. The female intending to become a nun is put to the vote, in a chapter of the whole sisterhood, each member having received a white and a black bean. If any black beans are found in the box, no inquiry is made who put them, but the candidate quits the house. If they are all white ones, she enters the choir with the nuns, who proceed to say vespers; the chapter having been summoned a quarter before three (the vesper hour). At the end of Complin the abbess quits her seat for the middle of the choir, where the young person meeting her kneels, and requests 'to be admitted a member of that community.' The superior opens a book, from which she reads the rules of their order, and finishes with these comfortless words:—'When you would wish to sleep, you must watch; when you would work, you must pray; when you would eat, you must fast; and

when you wish to talk, you must be silent.' Then adding much in favour of penance and mortification, the abbess thus concludes: 'If you will truly observe these rules, accept this book and this roll of bread, as an earnest that henceforward you will share our spirituals and our temporals.'

"The *postulante* (as she is then called) takes the book and the loaf; her dress is altered for a black robe, a kerchief, and white veils; and whilst she salutes each of the nuns, *Te Deum* is chanted; after which every one leaves the church, and the remainder of the evening is considered a recreation.

"The postulante now applies herself to Latin, and to learn the rules of the order:—it is her business to ring the bell at four in the morning to summon the nuns to matins, and to clean the work-room. As soon as convenient after the space of six weeks a day is fixed for her entering her noviciate; a second chapter having been previously called to try the candidate again,

by vote:—presuming her conduct to have been such as to ensure her the favour of the sisterhood, a day is fixed, and printed notices are posted to give information, that 'at ten in the morning (naming a day) a lady (naming her) is to take the veil.' Accordingly, eight days before the one mentioned, the postulante enters into her retreat;—that is, she spends that time wholly secluded in her cell; except that she walks in the garden for the space of one hour during each day, at which time she enjoys the society of one of the community, the rest she passes in silence; spending those eight days in meditation and prayer; making a general confession of the sins of her whole life, and in the most solemn preparation for quitting the world.

"On the appointed day she is handsomely dressed, generally wearing the diamonds of some distinguished personage, and repairs to the middle of the choir, where she kneels on a velvet cushion during high mass: after which, the curtain

which always hangs before the grate is undrawn; the grate is then unlocked, and the postulante proceeds towards the high altar, preceded by two young ladies who strew flowers in her path, and two others carrying large lighted candles. A fifth follows her with a basket containing her habit, &c. whilst a lady superbly dressed walks by her side, for the purpose of giving her away. Arrived before the altar, the high-priest addresses her in Latin with 'Daughter, what is thy request?' She answers, 'To be a member of this worthy community.' He bids her rise: she seats herself upon a stool before the altar; her attendants sit behind her, and there hear a sermon adapted to the occasion, in which the preacher displays in glowing colours the difficulties, the merits and the rewards, of a monastic life. The sermon ended, the lady takes the postulante's hand and presents it to the high-priest: he leads her back to the grate, when he places her hand within that of the abbess who meets her

there, at the same time mentioning her request. As she proceeds up the aisle, flowers are again strewed in her path; two acolytes perfume her with frankincense, her attendants following. The abbess receives the postulante; on which the latter takes her nosegay from her breast, and, turning towards the people, throws it upon the ground, saying, 'Thus I renounce ye, vain world! and all your pomps and vanities, for ever.' Instantly she enters the choir; the grate is locked; and the abbess having cut from her left temple a lock of hair, the postulante quits the choir. A grand piece of music is performed: at its conclusion she re-enters, clothed in a habit of gray cloth, her hair flowing on her shoulders; and in this dress of a Magdalen she prostrates herself on a velvet cushion during the chanting of the Litany; which finished, the abbess puts upon her a petticoat of fine white cloth, over that a rochet of cambric, with veils of the same; and placing a crown of white roses upon her head, presents her

to the community:—a grand *Te Deum* is performed. And thus ends a ceremony which is every way calculated to inspire the youthful mind with a degree of enthusiastic ardour that remains for some time afterwards.

"The novice (as the candidate is now called) continues her probation during one year and a day; she is then again voted for; and being received, notices are again posted, 'that on a certain day such a person (naming her) will make her religious profession:' and she enters into a second retreat of eight days. On the morning of the appointed day the novice once more kneels in the middle of the choir during mass; and at the Communion she receives the sacrament. Mass finished, the high priest (attended by a deacon, subdeacon, and acolytes) comes to the grate, holding the chalice, which contains the host, over the head of the novice; whilst she, from a printed paper, pronounces her vows in the following words: 'I, sister'

(mentioning the name she has taken in religion—say Mary)—'I, sister Mary, in the sight of Almighty God, in the sight of the Virgin Mary, of all the angels and saints, of you, holy father, of this worthy community and of the congregation here present, do promise to keep faithfully the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and inclosure, according to the rules of the order of this community.' Then rising, she presents the paper to the abbess, who on receiving it says—'Observe, daughter! that, according as you keep these vows, they will appear for or against you at the day of judgement.' The abbess then puts a ring on the nun's finger, which has this device J. H. S. and tells her to be faithful to Christ her spouse. The white veils are changed for black ones; a crown of red roses is placed upon her head, and the ceremony finishes with a solemn *Te Deum*."

"Did they really never try to make you a nun?" asked Mrs. Smith.—"Never," replied Mrs. Stewart; "I have been in se-

veral convents, and never knew compulsion used. Indeed I never heard but of one person who was intended from childhood to be a nun; and I am ignorant whether she became one or not—It was an extraordinary circumstance."—"Can you tell it us?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "Certainly," said Mrs. Stewart.

"It is now better than twenty years since I left school. Five years before I quitted the convent, a person appeared at it with a sweet child only two years old; —we were told that the little creature's parents had narrowly escaped being lost in a storm at sea, and that its mother had made a vow, should they be saved, to consecrate the child to the Virgin Mary. By a wonderful interposition of Providence they were saved. The nuns cherished the infant as the peculiar care of Heaven:—it was always clothed in white, in honour of the Virgin Mary; indeed so particularly was that order observed, that we should have deemed it sacrilege to have put the least bit of coloured

ribbon about her. In each of my letters from the convent, the virtues and gentle manners of Maria were always mentioned. I had an aunt who was a nun in that house: she is dead; and it is now six years since I have received any news from Paris."

Mrs. Stewart, who sat rather more forward than the others, thought she heard a deep sigh; and looking back perceived Mrs. Fisher in the act of sinking to the ground in a swoon. A thing so sudden, in the open air too, greatly alarmed and astonished the ladies. One searched her pocket for salts; another threw some water in Mrs. Fisher's face; whilst the young ones loosened her dress. These united exertions in a short time so far recovered Mrs. Fisher as to enable her to walk to Mrs. Stewart's house, though not without assistance, for she was really very ill:—the colour had entirely fled her cheeks; and when in the house she requested her hostess would permit her lying upon the bed awhile. When Mrs. Stewart showed Mrs. Fisher

to her own chamber, the latter said, "I am distressed to give you all this trouble—I do not know what ails me—I believe your story affected me; for, to say the truth, a very intimate friend of mine did send a child to a convent; and when you were describing the *Maria* you spoke of, it struck me it might be the same person; and knowing my friend's anxiety, I hope when you have leisure you will tell me what you have heard of her."

"Indeed, dear madam," replied Mrs. Stewart, "I would willingly give you all the information in my power; but that amounts to very little. I never heard her called by any other name than Maria. You shall see her signature," continued Mrs. S——, as she unlocked a small drawer, from which she took a paper. "This letter is from her; it is one she had the goodness to write to me during my aunt's illness."

Mrs. Fisher reached out her hand for the letter, at the same time turned her head the other way; which Mrs. Stewart observ-

ing, she supposed her friend to be sleepy, and wishing her better when she should awake, went to entertain her guests below.

On opening the parlour door Mrs. Stewart heard distinctly the name of Fisher, and perceived the ladies had been racking their brains to find out what it was that had so suddenly affected her. "Perhaps," said Mrs. L——, "she has some relatives abroad who may have suffered in the Revolution." "Possibly," Mrs. Stewart replied; "but I think it more probable that sitting so long on the damp ground has given her cold;—it was very imprudent of us all; and as she is not the youngest, she is very likely to suffer severely from it." "Ten to one," said Mrs. B——, "but she may have the rheumatism as long as she lives."—"Indeed she may," said Mrs. L——; "I dare say she is more than fifty?"

"I do not know," said Mrs. Stewart; "but I think not: for I have always observed Londoners look old sooner than other people. Indeed I never gave her age a

thought: she seems sensible, and perfectly well behaved."—"She has seen a great deal of life, and is highly connected," said Mrs. B——: "but could you behold her in her own house you would be delighted with her conduct. I never witnessed so good a wife; she is absolutely too good; she would spoil any man: her husband's look is to her a law —and he, such a morose being! you would pity her could you see them together."

"Has Mrs. Fisher any children?" inquired Mrs. Smith.

"Two amiable daughters, Frances and Emma," answered Mrs. B——. "She had not any by her former husband: Mr. B—— knew him very well; his name was Clark; he was a strange, odd-tempered man, and very unlike her in his disposition. He died suddenly, in consequence of over-heating himself and then drinking two bottles of cider, which brought on a complaint in the bowels that carried him off in less than a week."

A little before five o'clock the gentlemen

returned from their tour; and expressed themselves very glad to hear dinner wasnearly ready—declaring, they had had nothing good but wine since they set out; and the burthen of their story was, that there was nothing eatable out of Douglas. But this was an observation made at random, there being every comfort throughout the island: —as to luxuries, they are only to be met with in Douglas.

Whilst the cloth was laying on the table the gentlemen went to the post-office, and Mrs. Stewart to see the invalid. She was better, and accompanied her hostess down stairs, though it was evident she exerted herself very much to do so. On her plate she found two letters which Mr. Stewart had brought her; one was from her husband, the contents of which made her instantly determine to return with the mail. Though told it would sail so early as the second night, and feeling a strong inclination to be better acquainted with Mrs. Stewart;—yet nothing could prevent her complying

with the wish of Mr. Fisher. She did sail with the packet on the Friday night, having first told Mrs. Stewart she must not be surprised at seeing her hand-writing; to which the latter replied, by assuring her it would be a welcome sight.

These two ladies had conceived a lasting regard for each other. Mrs. Stewart having met with many disappointments among her old friends, and having few acquaintance in the island, was pleased to meet with a female whose mind she fancied to be congenial to her own;—whilst Mrs. Fisher absolutely felt that the happiness of her future existence depended upon her new acquaintance. So feeling, it can be no wonder that one of the first letters Mrs. Fisher wrote after her return to London was addressed to her new friend.

LETTER VIII.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO MRS. STEWART.

Sloane street, September.

DEAR MADAM,

THREE weeks have nearly passed since I left your little island, and which indeed I quitted with regret. The civilities I received in it will make me think of it with pleasure and gratitude. I had a delightful passage, only seven hours, and the weather so fine I remained all that time on deck—we landed about six on Saturday morning.

Whitehaven is a dirty-looking town, but much larger than I expected to see it. Not liking the idea of crossing the sands, I took my place on the coach to Penrith. The road is circuitous, hilly, and would be wearisome but for the variety of the prospect, which at this season I think particularly beautiful. The tinge of autumn had already begun to change the colour of the foliage—Nothing

to me is more gratifying than a contemplation of the beauteous variety of Nature! I have always found, when my mind has been ruffled by accidents and crosses, which I have frequently met with, that if I had it in my power to walk out in the country, it operated more toward soothing my feelings than all the reasoning of philosophy:—a view of Nature's works expands and informs the mind of a rational thinking being—But whither is my pen leading me? from my fireside in London to the meandering brook and peaceful dell—Return, wandering imagination, and be henceforth steady. The expense of travelling this road far exceeded what I had supposed; the inside fare to London being no less than six pounds three shillings. What adds much is the frequent change of coachmen. I am surprised this expense is not better regulated in England: their demand is so frequent, and their insolence if refused so great, that this part of accommodation calls for general amendment.

On my road home I did not meet with any extraordinary incidents; only the common occurrences of a stage-coach—a very talkative young lady, who spoke more of her family in one hour than a person would learn by ten years residence in its vicinity. I have been many times surprised that people should be so communicative to strangers. Often have I pitied a young female, when I have noticed a dashing man, seeing the openness of her disposition, ask her many impertinent questions, for the mere purpose of amusing himself with her innocent but ill-placed frankness. From my own observations, I have resolved never to suffer my daughters to enter a public vehicle without some prudent companion.

I found all well at home, and very grateful for the kind manner in which you and your friends entertained me in Douglas: —they long to see you. From my last hour's conversation with you, I feel particularly sorry that there is no prospect of our meeting soon:

for I found Mr. Fisher so unjustly prejudiced against the island, that all I could say was answered by him with "Yours is romantic nonsense—the people flattered you—sure way to gain a woman. Doctor H—— told me he could not have lived one week longer in the disgraceful spot!"—Then saying "he would sooner go to the desert part of Siberia," he concludes the subject with "It is most probable that we shall fix in some retired part of Wales."

Can I be of any service to you, dear madam, in this metropolis? If there is any thing in which I can serve you, consider me as an old acquaintance. Perhaps I am of a romantic disposition, for I generally form my opinion at first sight; and from the hour I beheld you at Mrs. B——'s a something drew my heart imperceptibly towards you; I feel an inclination to confide in you more than in any other person. How can I account for this? I cannot—the idea arises from nature, and I like to indulge it:—in so

doing, I hope you will not think me troublesome. I have long wanted and wished for a friend; and trust you will pardon this step to make one of you.

It strikes me at this moment, that should Mr. Stewart be in the habit of reading your letters he will think me one of those common characters, "a romantic female."—Tell him I am forty years of age, therefore have passed the season when chimeras fill the brain—Tell him that I am an enthusiast, but not a mad one.

The lady of whom I spoke to you concerning Maria has been to see me: she has not heard of or from her daughter for the last five years; and is so anxious respecting her that it is the subject of her thoughts day and night.—Would you favour her by inclosing the letter I saw for her perusal, that she may see whether it be her daughter's writing? Should it prove the latter, she will herself explain to you the manner and time of the child's going abroad, and will esteem herself the most fortunate of beings

to feel assured of her safety. Pray make my grateful respects to Mr. Stewart, and remember me to your amiable daughters—my girls long to know them; and assure those of your acquaintance who were so obliging as to notice me, that I shall never forget their kindness. With a wish to hear from you, I remain, dear madam, your friend and servant,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER IX.

MRS. STEWART TO MRS. FISHER.

Douglas, September.

You may judge, dear madam, how pleasing was the receipt of your letter, by my haste to answer it. We all rejoiced at your safe journey, and think you an excellent traveller:—you do not complain of sickness, bad inns, or bad usage of any kind. Well, I must own I never had occasion to complain either, and I have been a wanderer. When people are disposed to be pleased, they in general will be so.

Mr. Stewart did see your letter, and made a remark upon it—one in which I joined; but I will not repeat it, lest you should suspect me of flattery. I always show my letters to him; for I think it a bar to confidence between married persons not to do so. Should you write to me on any subject which may require secrecy, it will only be necessary to signify it in the first

line, and I promise you he will not be curious.

I agree with you, that there exists an astonishing power in sympathy, As a proof of it, before I received your favour I had been saying to my daughter Mary, that I was impatient to receive your promised letter; for I felt there was a congeniality of sentiment between us, which gave birth to a hope that our acquaintance, which had begun so unexpectedly, might continue for the remainder of our lives.

I am glad I mentioned to you the name of Maria. I have often wished to know whether she had become a nun or not. I think not, because a female cannot be professed before she is two-and-twenty; and supposing her to be only two years old when she was brought to the convent, she must now be about that age. My aunt has now been dead six years: I had an account of her patient sufferings, and since that period have not received a line from Paris, though I have written repeatedly. I have learned

from a former schoolfellow, that the nuns had once actually quitted their convent, and that after doing so an order had arrived from Buonaparte, that they should repossess themselves of their old habitation, which you may be sure they were glad to do. This act seems to have proceeded from a wish to gain popularity, which at that moment (the period when Buonaparte was coming back from Egypt) was of the utmost importance to the general. Whether the whole of the community returned, I do not know. Lady B——, from whom I heard it, knew the circumstance but imperfectly. I will inclose the letter written by Maria, and sincerely hope it may prove a source of satisfaction to your friend.

Mr. Stewart bids me say, he wishes your journey had concluded more favourably to us, by inducing your family to settle amongst us. But we are not surprised at the prejudice of Mr. Fisher—it is a general one—and, I am sorry to say, with truer foundation than most prejudices. Yet you know

exceptions are to be made and allowed upon every subject. From the treatment *we* have experienced here, I can with truth assert, it is the strangers who have visited the island that have drawn a stigma upon it: the natives are naturally well disposed, and kindly considerate where they see the smallest pretension to merit. I think some more years must pass before *we* can return to England; perhaps not at all in my day! Be that as it may, I feel I can be happy here, or elsewhere. I have many sources of pleasure within my own family. To be sure, I have my hours of sorrow and regret. I wish for the presence of absent friends,—perhaps with more earnestness on account of the impossibility of seeing them;—and I own I do also pine at times for the comforts I formerly enjoyed, and which I have now lost: but this feeling is meliorated from the reflection that no former acquaintance sees the change.—Pardon, dear madam, my falling into so home a subject. You see that I already experience a friendship to-

wards you, and have voluntarily opened that corner of my heart where the most interesting actions of my life are registered, and find that I could willingly admit you into all its intricacies—not without myself as guide to plead for every error. But this is a curious theme; I had better quit it, lest I get into a labyrinth that may require more time than my paper will allow, to get me fairly out again. Thanks for your kind offer, we think of troubling you with a few commissions shortly:—in the mean time, we hope to hear from you.—My family unite in best wishes, and an assurance from the younger part, that before your letter arrived it had been determined in council, that when any one of the family should find themselves within a short distance of your residence, they should hasten to it as to that of a friend. With a wish that this may meet with a reciprocal sentiment, I remain, dear madam, your obliged friend and humble servant,

ELIZA STEWART.

LETTER X.

FROM THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER TO MRS. STEWART.

Grosvenor Square, October.

MADAM,

I SHOULD feel at a loss to apologize for intruding a letter upon you; but from what my friend Mrs. Fisher has told me, I have reason to think you will forgive the trouble, when it has the good of a fellow-creature for its object. On this surmise I will proceed to inform you, madam, of the motive which has induced me to address you.

I have at this time in my house a young female for whom I feel the strongest interest, but whom it is not in my power to countenance publicly; and I wish to procure for her a residence in some respectable family, where she may remain unknown, and I trust be reclaimed from vicious habits, into which I grieve so say she has suffered

herself to be deluded. Since Mrs. Fisher's return, we have both talked the subject over; and it appears to us that she would have a great probability of remaining concealed in the Isle of Man.

Believe me, dearest madam, I have not a wish that *you* should engage a residence for her: I would by no means ask your protection of a person whom I cannot countenance myself. My request will extend no further than to ask if you can point out a respectable house in your town where she might lodge and board; and by obliging me with the direction, I would apply by letter, and ask no further notice of her from you, than that you would occasionally inquire into her conduct. I wish to be made acquainted with her behaviour, which might be easily known, by your saying the truth—that you have some knowledge of her friends, for whose sake you feel an interest in her concerns. And that you, madam, may not be led through complaisance to Mrs. Fisher, or to me her friend,

to act unbecoming your own dignity, I will disclose to you her real situation.

She was the mistress of the gay and thoughtless young Earl U——, under whose protection (as it is termed) she has lived three years. Last July she quitted him, with a resolution to spend the remainder of here life in penance and mortification: but she is only twenty years of age, is lovely in person, and possessed of various accomplishments. I tremble for her whilst she inhabits this metropolis, and shall not feel happy till I know her to be in a place of greater security. I cannot say to a certainty what her property may be, never having questioned the lady on that subject; but you may rely on its amounting to one hundred pounds per annum. Whatever her own income is, I will extend it to that sum; on which, I think, a single person may live very comfortably. You will render me an essential service, madam, by answering this as soon as you can conveniently. If you can point out a situation, and give me the direction,

I will write immediately; after which I will send a servant over with Miss Providence. The singularity of the name will doubtless strike you, as it at first did me; but the lady has passed most of her time in a convent, from which I guess she may be of French extraction, and suppose her name to be *La Providence*, not an uncommon one in France, and which in England would naturally be called Providence.

I will not enter further into this subject at present: for, to say the truth, I know but little of my visitor. She appears to be of an open disposition; yet there seems a certain something that preys upon her mind, and renders her absent to her own actions;—for *her* sake I wish she were more explicit: there is an elegance in her manner, and a piety throughout her conduct, which, did I not know the earl to be married to Lady Sarah, would rather have made me suppose her his wife than his mistress. What pity, that a person so

gifted to be virtuous should have proved so frail!

When I have had the honour of your answer, madam, I will consult Miss Providence; and after we shall have arranged matters between ourselves, will again do myself the pleasure of writing to conclude the business.

You will oblige me, madam, by making my best respects to Mr. Stewart and to your amiable daughters. I have the honour to subscribe myself, madam, your obedient and humble servant,

MARY HUNTER.

LETTER XI.

MRS. FISHER TO MRS. STEWART.

Sloane Street.

THANKS, dearest madam, for your kind and friendly epistle. On the receipt of it I repaired to my friend whose anxiety had been so roused by hearing of Maria: but the letter which you kindly inclosed did not lull her apprehensions. The only one she had received from her daughter was written at a very early age, and signed "Marie La Providence." The similitude of the name made us at first suppose that we saw a likeness in the writing of every word: but when we reasoned upon the matter, there seemed a strong improbability that her daughter, whom she supposes to have remained with the nuns, should be found in a person that had just quitted the society of a dissipated nobleman. So, after discussing the subject *pro* and *con*, we drew this con-

clusion—That the object of my friend's anxiety must be among the emigrant nuns who have sought refuge in this country; and that the circumstance of a similarity in the names of the two ladies is one of those incidents one deems extraordinary when it happens to interest oneself. I will not, therefore, dear madam, trouble you more with this subject at present. I presume that in a very short time Miss Providence will visit your island, as Mrs. Hunter informed me she had written to you, and the subject of her letter.

Mrs. Hunter is an excellent woman; she does good from principle. Do not think I mean to lower her in your opinion, when I say more from principle than feeling. I have known her above thirty years, during which period I have studied her well; and can assure you that I never knew her to commit an action that could be termed improper. I respect Mrs. H—— more than I do any other human being. I have experienced her friendship upon all occasions;

yet at this moment my heart tells me I admire more than I love her, which sentiment arises in me from the knowledge of her perfections. As it is not improbable that you may see her, I will give you the outline of her life.—She was niece to the late Lord S——, is otherwise nobly connected, and feels an innate pride that her ancestry have lived unmixed with plebeian blood to the present day. As Mrs. Hunter's figure is elegant, her manners polished, and her accomplishments many, she had numerous suitors in her youth: her heart felt a strong preference for the late Mr. P——, an accomplished and deserving man, possessing a handsome person and manners truly engaging. He loved Miss Morton (as she was then called), sincerely loved her; and she was equally attached to him: but he had no claim on which he could hope to obtain a title; and, what was worse, his estate of one thousand a year had been left him by an uncle who had acquired it in trade:—this was a blot for which no good qualities

could compensate in Miss Morton's idea; so after struggling during three years against a virtuous inclination, she conquered her feelings, and resigned her own happiness and the man she loved for the honourable Mr. Hunter, brother to Lord B——, whose temper was so tyrannical, that during her intercourse with him she never experienced one day's comfort. Poor Mr. P—— entered into an Irish regiment then going on foreign service, where he sought and found an honourable death in the cause of his country.

Mrs. Hunter, after spending ten years in vainly trying to please a man who could not be pleased, was released by his death from her galling fetters, and wisely determined never to repeat the marriage vow. But the violence Mrs. Hunter had exercised towards herself has made her rigorous to others: nor does she think a female deserves the smallest indulgence who deviates the least tittle from her duty.

The post-man's bell surprises me; it

says "It is six o'clock." I have only time to request my kind respects to Mr. Stewart, and love to the young ladies; and beg you, dear madam, to believe me your truly obliged friend and servant,

MARIA FISHER.

LETTER XII.

MRS. STEWART TO THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER.

Douglas.

Madam,

I AM sorry you should think an apology necessary for writing. Believe me, I feel honoured that any circumstance should have procured me the favour of hearing from you. —I think, madam, I have executed your commission in a way that will please you. I have found a family who possess every requisite to make a residence in it eligible, but one—they are poor; and that will be removed by the lady in question having so handsome an income that it will prevent her feeling any wants; for I assure you, madam, that an individual in this island with one hundred pounds per annum is thought to be rich: and provided the family I allude to obtain her for a resident, such a

person would be exceedingly useful to them. I will try to explain the circumstance. The lady, who is a widow, and her four daughters came here from England eight months ago —they are called Medcalf; but I have reason to think that is not their name, because a gentleman of my acquaintance knew them when they resided in England, when they were known by another. Mrs. Medcalf had no doubt a good reason for this change. Her husband was a merchant at Liverpool, who being of a speculative mind ventured too largely, and he became a bankrupt in consequence of repeated losses:—the whole of the property was sold. An annuity of fifty pounds, which had been settled on Mrs. Medcalf, was all that remained. But the most shocking part of the business was, that the unfortunate man put an end to his existence!—which latter circumstance was most likely the reason that the widow changed her name. She with her daughters retired to this spot, bringing with them what furniture their friends had kindly bought in

for their use from their own sale. By the advice of the gentleman above alluded to, they took a small house, intending to let their two best rooms when they should meet with a female disposed to live with them. At the time I called, every thing looked exceedingly neat, and I was struck with the polite and pleasant manners of the whole family. Three of the young ladies were employed at a piece of elegant needle-work, the fourth I understood was busy in household concerns; for, as they do not keep any servant, they do the work alternately. Mrs. Medcalf spoke with much frankness of her situation, and said they felt very happy to be able to increase their income by the use of the needle; and as her daughters had acquired some accomplishments, they took every opportunity of turning their talents to advantage. They all looked pleased at my mention of a young lady to board and lodge with them, and all united in saying they would endeavour to make a residence with them comfortable.

Any further commission that you, madam, may think proper to honour me with, I shall execute with equal pleasure. Should you wish to write to Mrs. Medcalf, you need only direct to her at the Post-office, Douglas, Isle of Man.

Mr. Stewart and family beg to unite with me in presenting their respects. I have the honour to remain, madam, your obedient and humble servant,

ELIZA STEWART.

LETTER XIII.

THE HONOURABLE MRS. HUNTER TO MRS. STUART.

Grosvenor Square.

I FEEL very sensible, dear madam, of your goodness in having troubled yourself so much on my account; and am quite delighted with the thoughts of Miss Providence having an opportunity of fixing herself in such a family as you have described Mrs. Medcalf's. She is much pleased; and we purpose leaving London next Thursday week, so that we may meet the mail at Whitehaven and accompany it to the island. You will perhaps wonder at the expression *we*, but I do really mean to go with Miss Providence, for which I have two reasons that I am about to explain: First, upon reading your polite and truly kind epistle, I felt that every thing was in favour of Miss P—

going: at the same time, it occurred to me that Mrs. Medcalf ought to be informed of the *exact situation* of the person she was about to admit into her family, which I should find difficult to express by writing. The only circumstance which gave rise to the supposition that this lady had been the mistress of Lord U—— was her expressions on first meeting with Mrs. Fisher:—her conduct strongly pleads there must be some great mistake. I never was a willing encourager of vice; nor would I knowingly become so: but reason tells me Maria is *innocent*—Hypocrisy may deceive in assuming the appearance of some particular virtue, but the practice of an undeviating habitual piety can only be the result of principle. On mentioning these thoughts to Mrs. Fisher, she represented that writing, (as I then spoke of doing) might prejudice Mrs. Medcalf;—that if Miss Providence went alone she would have no friend, no advocate, but must wait till time and her own good conduct should gain their esteem;—that first

impressions were often difficult to be eradicated. In short, she reasoned with so much warmth, that she convinced me that as I was a free agent, and of course not obliged to keep any one particular road, it would be spending my time in a charitable kind of manner to accompany Maria myself.—Secondly, Mr. Fisher, who always thinks "women should stay at home," for once departed from his general rule, and advised the journey so strongly that indeed I feel I must be right in taking it. Therefore this is to ask the further goodness of you to acquaint Mrs. Medcalf when she may expect her lodger.—I purpose coming back by the return of the same vessel, provided I feel well enough. It will give me additional pleasure that I shall have the honour of seeing you and your family, of which Mrs. Fisher has given me so pleasing a description.

With best respects, I remain, madam, your very humble servant,

MARY HUNTER.

Whilst these letters were passing, Mrs. Fisher was a constant visitor at Mrs. Hunter's:—there she sought every opportunity of seeing Maria. For that purpose she often called during those hours she knew Mrs. Hunter usually spent in visiting her acquaintance; and she always proceeded to Maria's own room, for the purpose of enjoying uninterrupted conversation. In consequence of Mr. Fisher being severely indisposed, Mrs. F. had omitted these visits for the last few days: and as she had not informed Maria of the cause of her absence, she, from the feelings which the unhappy are apt to indulge, imagined the omission to have arisen on the part of Mrs. Fisher from a wish to relinquish the acquaintance of her erring friend. Therefore at one o'clock on the following day, instead of listening in anxious expectation for the knock that usually announced her visitor, Maria sat down to peruse over her old letters. She was in the act of reading one, when the wel-

come sound was heard; and she hastened to gather her letters into the box and to wipe a tear from her cheek, when Mrs. Fisher entered the room. Maria, in her hurry to put away the letters, had left out an article of linen, which Mrs. F. happening to turn her eye upon, exclaimed, "My dear young lady! are you the owner of the child's robe which I perceive by that box?" "Madam," replied Miss Providence, "I have but one secret—it regards that robe. You have treated me kindly from the moment I first beheld you—the greatest part of my future happiness seems to depend upon you; —then let me request, madam, that you will avoid any questions on this subject. Perhaps, were you acquainted with every circumstance, I might lose that friendship now to me so valuable!"

"Permit me," said Mrs. Fisher, "to ask you only one question:—if it be your wish, I will never again mention this matter—Will you answer me?"

"I will, dearest madam," replied Maria, "on your own condition—that this subject shall never be renewed between us."

"Agreed.—Did you ever see your mother?—and is she living?"

"You have indeed put a query I hardly know how to answer.—At the time I saw my mother I was little more than two years old; of course cannot be said to have seen her; because memory is not supposed to trace ideas from so early a period. Mine must have been the tenderest, the best of mothers, since her kindness so stamped her image upon my mind, that from that time I have never ceased to think of her: and so justly does my heart delineate her, that I am sure were I now to behold her I should instantly recognise the features my mind has so often dwelt upon. But, alas! this is impossible; for doubtless my mother is dead! You are the first, the only person, whom I ever supposed to be in the least like her.—But, dearest madam, let us close this conversation;—allow me to love you:—that

fancied likeness first endeared you to me—Since, your own affectionate treatment of one who must appear to you so unworthy, has added gratitude to affection. I look up to you as my best friend, because your indulgence allows me to speak my thoughts; and I feel that a continuance of this kindness is necessary to my existence."

Here both ladies were much affected: and as Mrs. Fisher was aware of her own agitated appearance, she hastened to quit the house before Mrs. Hunter's return:—so promising to see her friend again as soon as possible, she bade Maria an affectionate adieu.

On Mrs. Fisher's return home she found that her husband had gone to lie down, as he felt an attack of his old complaint was threatening him. She hastened to his chamber, and in a soothing manner endeavoured to make Mr. Fisher forget his pain, by conversing on the most cheerful subjects, though her own feelings were far from being in unison with her words. After

talking a considerable time, and receiving only for answer, "Is that all?" or a laconic "Pshaw!" she went down to prepare what she knew to be most agreeable to his taste; and returning with the cup herself, was happy to hear him acknowledge that he relished it. She then ventured to say, "Mr. Fisher, you have often promised to show me the copy of the letter which accompanied our Maria to the convent;—suppose you favour me with a sight of it now?"

"What has brought that foolish thought into your head?" replied her husband:—"some romantic whim or other."

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," said Mrs. Fisher; "for I never was more free from such notions than I am at this moment;—but you know I always had a great wish to see it, and you have put me off so often!"

"Then, Mrs. Fisher," replied the surly husband, "I shall only put you off once more....till I am dead;—for whilst I live

I do not choose to be teased on that subject."

"Heaven grant that your death may be at a very distant period!" exclaimed Mrs. Fisher. "Believe me, my dear, I never saw you look better than you do at present: these attacks of the gout are certainly very painful; but I hope they do, and will, preserve you long from any other disorder."

"I am not obliged to you, Mrs. Fisher, for your kindness in thinking me so well off with this infernal gout; and I cannot help wishing you had it, madam, 'to keep off other complaints,' as you think so mightily well of it."

Mrs. Fisher sighed; begged her husband "to believe that nothing was further from her heart than a desire to see him suffer:"—to which he replied,

"I think if you would cease your clack I might sleep a little."

It was Monday when Mr. Fisher felt an attack of the gout; and having often expe-

rienced it, he expected it would have gone off in the usual manner. In this he was disappointed; for on the following Thursday his head was so badly affected that he was alarmingly delirious. His wife never quitted his bed-side. On Friday she sent her daughter Frances with letters to Mrs. Hunter, containing her kind wishes to Mrs. H. and expressing her attachment to Maria; with an assurance that nothing but Mr. Fisher's illness should have prevented her personal adieus to her favourite;—concluding with an earnest request to hear from her as soon as she should find herself settled.

As Mrs. Fisher watched by the sick-bed, it occurred to her that this was the time, and perhaps the only opportunity she should ever have of reading the copy of that letter, the contents of which she was so anxious to learn. "This very evening Maria is to quit England," said Mrs. Fisher to herself: "were it possible for me to feel certain respecting her origin, I should be happy:—nay, should

it be as I think, she also would be happy." The latter argument quieted every scruple, and she resolved to open her husband's bureau. "It is my husband's," she continued to herself; "I do not want to pry into those actions he may choose to conceal; I will not open any letter without having reason for thinking it the one I am in search of. My heart is miserable; I can no longer exist with this weight of suspense; I cannot even perform my duty toward *thee!*" The last idea determined her; and looking at her husband as she ejaculated the sentence, and seeing him inclined to doze, she took the key from his pocket and gently opened the desk. She drew out the small drawer where she knew he kept his letters; then, bolting the door, which she usually did when Mr. Fisher seemed inclined to sleep, in order to prevent his being disturbed, she removed her chair nearer to the fire, and began her employment. The letters were tied up in small parcels, and ticketed. Many she hastily put down again;

but at last she met with a small packet, with this label, "The concerns of a friend:—To be burnt unopened, as my executor values the request of a dying man." Mrs. Fisher saw that the papers in this parcel had no directions: she was at a loss which of them to open, terrified lest she should involuntarily become the mistress of a secret she was never intended to know. She sat with the packet on her knee, till a recollection of Mr. Fisher's state made her sensible there was no time to deliberate. "Doubtless," she reasoned, "this paper contains the wished-for copy; and, as Mr. Fisher has always refused to let me see it, should he die I am certain never to obtain it, since his executor will fulfil his desire in burning the parcel." The act now seemed justifiable, and she pulled out one of the papers. What was her astonishment to find that the writer of it was a lady whom she had often entertained at her house! that it acknowledged the receiving of one hundred pounds; and

also informed him of the health and well-doing of his son, of whom, in the next line, she styled herself the *happy mother!*"

For this time all further search was at an end. The feelings of Mrs. Fisher were roused; it was with difficulty she could now replace the letter, the parcel, and the drawer, which she hastened to be rid of; and locking the desk, she put the key in its place; then sat down to collect her scattered thoughts, and to summon reason to her aid.

I will not pretend to delineate her sentiments. A cool disinterested person is unable to describe feelings which cannot at the moment be distinguished even by the owner. Mrs. Fisher did not love her husband at this period; but she thought of the time when she had loved him passionately. "My heart," said she, "would have always so loved him, but for the variety of wretchedness he has at different periods caused me to suffer, and which has alienated my affections."

Mr. Fisher now called: and so well had his wife regulated her wandering thoughts, that she approached his bed with a complacent look; and when he said that his stomach felt affected, she was really sorry, and chasing every selfish thought, hastened to procure him more assistance. He continued ill for several days, and was delirious every successive evening. On the third from that I mentioned, Mrs. Fisher had so well resigned her mind to circumstances, that she felt equal to renew her search for the letter. At the moment she again determined on the trial, not one particle of curiosity actuated her; on the contrary, she resolved to avoid reading any paper she might find written in the same hand as that of the preceding evening. Accordingly, she obtained the key in the manner she had done before, and once more had the fatal parcel on her lap. Three papers had she drawn from it, all in the hand of the former evening: these she instantly reclosed, true to her resolves;—for she had been often tried,

and disappointments create fortitude. At the fifth essay she opened one where she read, "Copy of a letter with M, in the year 1778." The time agreed; and Mrs. Fisher's feelings became so agitated, that she found it would be best to put the rest all away, and trust to the morrow for replacing this. It was well she did so; for the desk had not been closed five minutes when her husband grew so violently ill that she was obliged to hurry the letter into her pocket, and to send in haste for the physician.

On Doctor Charters' entrance he pronounced that Mr. Fisher's disorder was gaining upon him past the reach of medicine, and advised Mrs. Fisher to get her husband to settle any worldly business he might have to do. She candidly informed the doctor that this was a subject she could not mention to her husband: "He would only suppose my motive in so doing to be an interested one," said Mrs. Fisher; "because I know that he has not made a will.

On account of my children," continued the lady, "and not on my own, I wish some friend to inform him of his danger, knowing that his spiritual as well as his worldly concerns are in an unsettled state. I think," she added, "I will get our good clergyman to mention the subject to him; for although Mr. Fisher has never been a church-goer, I know that he respects the man:—I'll send for him instantly." And that moment she instructed her daughter Frances to step to Mr. Dorset's house. She did so; and having the good fortune to find the reverend divine at home, he was by Mr. Fisher's bed-side in less than an hour after the physician had quitted it.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Dorset, "I was sorry to hear but a bad account of you today."

"Indeed," said Mr. Fisher, "this is the worst attack I have ever felt; but Dr. Charters does not seem to think me in any danger."

"Notwithstanding the doctor's silence, a

man with your sense must know that violent diseases always endanger the body; and though I do not wish to alarm you, yet, as a friend, I will be honest in saying that I would advise you to be prepared for the worst;—But why should I say the worst? when to leave this world is to exchange a scene of toil and care, to enter the abode of rest and pleasure!"

"Stop," said Mr. Fisher; "you are now speaking only of the good;—what prospect would you hold out to him who has suffered his passions to mislead him throughout his life?"

"Sir," replied the divine, "there is not a saint in heaven who has not felt the effect of passions. From the existence of them our trials arise;—where is the person who has not been misled at times? but when conviction has satisfied the erring mind that it was wrong,—from the moment inspiration breathes that thought, the heart amends; the work of conversion is begun, and the blessing of God, which is ever ready to pour

itself abundantly on his favourite man, will mature the endeavours of frail nature, and perseverance will crown the whole."

"This, my kind friend," returned Mr. Fisher, "is not the work of a few hours only."

"The heart can give no more than *all*," replied Mr. Dorset; "nor does Infinite Wisdom require more. Should your Creator spare you many years, I trust that you will be steady in his service; but should he think proper to call you hence in a few hours, I doubt not the sincerity of your intentions will be accepted; and that deeds resolved, though unperformed, will obtain a reward in the sight of Him who knows every movement of the human heart."

"You are really a comforter," said Mr. Fisher; "and I wish we had been earlier and better acquainted. Many things, Mr. Dorset, weigh heavy on my soul; and I am now scarcely fit to do any thing. I wish, too, that I had made my will whilst I was in health."

"That will be more easily done than you imagine," said Mr. Dorset; "will you allow me to send your lawyer to you? When that business is over, you will be better able to collect your thoughts;—when worldly matters are settled to the best of your ability, your soul will have fewer hindrances in its heavenly intercourse." Then kindly taking Mr. Fisher's hand, the divine told him he would call again in the evening; and requested him to be as composed as possible. "A will may be made," said he, "in few words, and there will be less room for quibbles of law."

Mr. Dorset stopped a few minutes only, to inform Mrs. Fisher of the happy disposition of her husband, and left her to execute his commission with the attorney. As soon as he was gone, Mrs. Fisher endeavoured to arrange her ideas into some kind of order; and so far conquered the confused state of her mind, as to determine on having some conversation with Mr. Fisher:—so taking a medicine in her hand it was time

he should have, she was directly at his bedside.

"I am grieved, dear sir," said she, "to find there is any idea of danger."

"Considering the grief you express, madam," replied the invalid, "your countenance does not agree with your heart."

Never till this moment was Mrs Fisher aware that her thoughts had not been on her husband so much as on her children; and her feelings acknowledged his reproach was just. But in her accustomed tone she rereplied, "You cannot, Mr. Fisher, doubt my prayers and wishes for your recovery—during more than twenty years my heart has been devoted to you! Never, during that period, has it wandered from its object;—you must yourself allow that I have been true to your interest, and faithful to my marriage vow."

"I believe you, Maria," replied Mr. Fisher. "But to what purpose this conversation?"

Mrs. Fisher, encouraged by his calling

her Maria, knelt by the bed-side; and taking her husband's hand a tear fell upon it, whilst she said, "I have a favour to ask:—Think of the time, Frederic, when I used to be your *kind*, your *dear Maria!* remember our first-born! let us atone, as much as possible, for the injury we did her in concealing our marriage, and, in consequence, concealing her birth from the world. Be assured, that wherever she is, she suffers from our neglect of her:—Do leave her a portion—if not equal to the others, a something: I would be satisfied to depend on my children for my future subsistence, should I outlive you; but in mercy to us both, the authors of her sufferings! (for my heart tells me she suffers) give her not cause to curse us, by leaving her solely dependent on this varying world." A foot on the stairs prevented Mrs. Fisher urging the matter further. She rose as Mr. Althorpe the attorney entered the room: then, aware of the exertion her husband had made and still had to undergo, she forced him to swallow

a glass of wine, and withdrew; secretly imploring the divine assistance, that her husband might act with integrity.

As soon as Mr. Fisher found his wife had left him, he desired Mr. Althorpe to sit near him; and saying there was paper and ink on the table, desired he would take down the heads of his will. Then collecting himself a few minutes, he proceeded as follows:

"After the usual commencement of providing for my just debts, funeral expenses, and so forth, I give to my wife, Maria Fisher, an annuity of one hundred pounds, to be paid to her in half-yearly payments out of my stock in the five-per-cents. I also give to my said wife the sum of one hundred pounds, to be disposed of as she knows is my intention: with this only injunction—that she reside in the small house in Sloane-street, which I also give to her for her life. But she must forfeit that, the hundred pounds, and her annuity, if she absent her-

self from London during the space of ten whole days."

Here Mr. Althorpe observed, "Might it not be possible that Mrs. Fisher's children may settle at a distance from the metropolis? and would it not then be hard if she could not go to visit them?"

Mr. Fisher interrupted the attorney by telling him, "Sir, I sent for you to write my will, I wish to indite it myself."

"I stand corrected," replied the attorney, "and am ready to proceed."

"I have nothing more that is very particular to add," said Mr. Fisher; "only to divide the remainder of my property, whether money or chattels, between my two daughters Frances and Emma, share and share alike. Mr. Worthing and Mr. Norman will be my executors: to them and to Mrs. Hunter I leave each five guineas for a ring;—this is all. And now, sir, I must beg you will write it immediately. How soon may I expect you?"

"Within three hours," replied Mr. Althorpe; "I will instantly go and draw it myself." So saying, he quitted the apartment.

Mrs. Fisher, as soon as she found Mr. Althorpe was gone, hastened to her husband's room. She found him looking much worse than the last time she had been there; indeed, Mr. Fisher at the moment of his wife's entrance appeared almost exhausted; however, he roused himself to say, "Maria, I have complied with your request so far as to leave one hundred pounds at your own disposal. I know that sum does not equal your wishes, but I have no notion of feeding a set of canting hypocrites; as you know, should our child be living, it will not be herself, but the community, that would benefit by the money. Another thing I have mentioned is this: I have made it a condition in my will, that you do not absent yourself above ten days from London. This is kindly meant:—from a knowledge of your romantic disposition, I thought it not improbable that, after my

death, you might take a fancy to visit France, in order to seek our child; and as this would be highly improper, I thought it but kind to prevent your acting so foolishly.—And now, Maria," extending his feverish hand towards her, "God bless you! I feel myself very languid, and believe that death is fast approaching. When I am gone, try to think favourably of my actions:—tell my children I bless them. If I could sleep, it might recover me a little."

Mrs. Fisher pressed his hand fervently; her heart was melted;—at that moment she felt how ardently she had once loved him. She prevailed upon him to swallow a glass of wine, and told him she would sit still whilst he slept. But in fact she employed herself better:—she knelt behind the curtain of his bed, and there prayed in the most earnest manner that Almighty God would pour his divine spirit into the heart of her husband; that he might see the errors of his past life, and purify himself by sorrow, and resolutions of amendment. At

that period she thought not of the will, nor of any other worldly matter, her whole mind being occupied with considering in what words she could, when her husband should awake, impress on his mind the necessity of making a religious end. "How," said she to herself, "shall I do this? He has treated religious subjects with indifference all his life long! He had neither proper precepts nor example set before him in his youth—May God in his mercy compassionate his ignorance! and, in consideration of that, be more indulgent to his errors!"

During these meditations, Frances and Emma had been twenty times at the door, to listen if they could hear their father. They were alarmed at the long silence in his chamber. Nothing disturbed his slumber, nor the pious meditations of Mrs. Fisher, till the lawyer himself tapped at the room door with the will, accompanied by Doctor Charters and the Rev. Mr. Dorset, whom he had brought with him to witness

it. The noise these gentlemen made on the stairs awoke the invalid. When Doctor Charters heard the length of time Mr. Fisher had slept, he shook his head, and whispered Mr. Althorpe, "I fear he will be unable to sign: this stupor indicates a diminution of the reasoning faculties; his end will be free from pain; nature is worn to the last, and it is much to be feared he will not be capable of writing."

They were all agreeably surprised, on approaching the bed, to hear Mr. Fisher ask "whether Mr. Althorpe had brought the will?"

The lawyer answered, "Yes:" and proposed the reading it to Mr. Fisher.

"No," exclaimed the latter, "that will be unnecessary, if you give your word that you wrote all I told you, and nothing more."

"Your own words to the letter, as a man of honour," answered Mr. Althorpe. On which the invalid was raised in his bed; and taking the pen, he found his hand so unsteady that he requested Dr. Charters to guide his

fingers, which the physician did. It was then executed by the other gentlemen; all sensible of Mr. Fisher being perfectly sane of mind.

The invalid lay down again; but upon the doctor trying to put a liquid into his mouth, he found he could not swallow it. Upon which Mr. Dorset proposed to Mrs. Fisher that she should go below to her daughters. She did so. The clergyman returned to the sick-room; and in about twenty minutes after, took upon himself the melancholy task of informing Mrs. Fisher that her husband had breathed his last.

"I wish it had pleased God that he had had time to have profited by your spiritual assistance," said Mrs. Fisher; "but I hope his last thoughts were on his Maker."

"I said a prayer," answered Mr. Dorset; "and by his looks I am sure he joined me. We must remember that his soul is in the hands of a merciful as well as a just Judge," added he. "But each

day's experience convinces me that a good life is the only sure preparation for a happy death."

Mrs. Fisher said, "I should like, sir, to spend half an hour alone; and then should be obliged if you would call in and advise me on the melancholy but necessary steps I must next pursue."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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